



ASTR AEUS

A BNHA ASTROLOGY ZINE





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ARIES

MARCH 21 – APRIL 19



Development
Studio 2

IN PROGRESS:
Project
Zettai
ASTRAEUS!
* HATSUME MEI!

STOP!
CLEAN UP!
POWER OFF!

STOP

HAND TOOLS

STUDIO RULES

MEI!

FIRST AID

#1
MOM

SINGULARITY

In the cold black wastes of space, death is inevitable. Time marches on, and everything eventually falls to ruin. The fabric of the universe is littered with the carcasses of beings large and small, of planet-destroying creatures that swim between galaxies and the crushed hulls of ships caught in unfortunate circumstances.

Even the stars themselves pass away, but those that become supernovae are not a cause for grief. Excess matter is burnt away to leave the star's core, and that core holds new life in the form of cosmic consciousness.

Alpha Arietis dies in a brilliant storm, spraying billions of years' worth of accumulated gas and matter through the cosmos as it collapses in on itself. Great fingers of dust reach toward the endless abyss, and cradled in the palm of the cooling nebula, a godling sleeps.

His heart is white-hot and aching, all the pain of his progenitor's end pulsing through him as he curls in on himself. The gazes of the other gods weigh heavily on him as the universe swims into focus. Their whispers ripple across galaxies to wash over his still-tender form, awakening in him an anger that beams into the darkness as his eyes open, twin crimson spheres cutting through the endless night.

From the beginning, he knows malice. He knows rejection, because those same tittering gods look upon him and deem him unworthy of a place in their pantheon. They gaze into the darkness amidst his ashy kingdom and name him Tomura, because his soul is turbulent with loss.

Perhaps that is the beginning of their end.

Tomura is a starving god. When the dust settles and the light around him fades, the heavens grow quiet. Some form of stability returns to the space that's been carved out for him, and when the great celestial creatures begin to return to the area, he reaches out with deadly hands and sighs in relief as their energy bolsters him.

Soon enough, they don't come anymore.

More thrums through him, a desperate cry in the dark. *I need more than this.*

He claws his way out of his little nook, rending great seams of death and destruction in the very fabric of space. No one stops him; no one is willing to take responsibility for a young god's anger. They whisper and migrate away from his presence, as though the borders of their territories are little more than a ballgown and Tomura is a muddy god waiting to wreak havoc.

But for as hungry as he is, there's a larger ache in him: loneliness. And as lonely creatures do, he eventually settles into the knowledge that he is alone in the vastness of the universe. No one bothers him, even if deep down he wishes they would. They simply patch the wounds he's left and breathe a collective sigh of relief when Tomura crawls back home to rot under the light of stars too distant to feel, leaving the tales of his destruction to serve as a warning.

Beware the ashen one.

Civilizations rise and fall in the time he slumbers. Entire solar systems are formed and destroyed in calamitous occurrences, and he pays them no mind until prayers from a long-distant planet slip past the rest of the gods' ears.

Lend us your strength. Bestow your wisdom upon us.

And Tomura, aching for something more than what he has now, does. He races through the sky to a pinwheel of light, luxuriating in the feeling of stars searing into him as he trails his spindly fingers through the galaxy's arms. It's not until he sees another god wandering in the distance that he hides himself away amidst the rock and gas.

He journeys to the planet and cradles it in his hands, pouring out his tales of rage and ruin, fighting and famine. He watches as greed makes rivers run red with blood, and as the small, blue-green orb ages, the fire in his soul is rekindled.

It's only when the peoples' prayers morph into cries of helplessness that the other gods take notice. Their anguish bleeds out through Tomura's embrace and soon, their prayers are answered.

The gods refuse to come near Tomura, crouched over the planet protectively, and so they turn their powers to its people instead. Mutations begin to appear throughout the population as more and more gods lend a hand, and those touched take up arms in the hope of saving their planet.

However, not every alliance is a good or worthy alliance, and eventually the little ball of green and blue is little more than cinders.

Tomura is alone again, and this time, he's an unignorable threat. He feels the weight of the gods' gazes as he slinks back to his territory, a scolded child waiting for the chance to lash out again. They berate him, tell him he's unworthy, that it's not his place to meddle in the affairs of other, lesser beings. They call him failure, call him monster, call him mistake.

He names them cowards.

As the ages pass, his ire morphs into an ice-cold fury. Under the cold light of distant stars Tomura waits, and as he waits, he listens.

Tales arise of a great rift at the edge of the universe. Few speak of it, but their whispers are enough to plant a seed of hope within Tomura's frozen heart. The rumor is that it is hungrier than Tomura itself—a ravenous maw that cares not what it consumes, only that it devastates everything in its path in the hopes of being whole again.

Another starving god, older than any that roam the heavens now; a god-eater that seeks only more, eternally.

And so, Tomura begins to wander. To and fro he journeys across the vast wastes between galaxies, searching for the one who may hold the secret to sating the emptiness in him. There are plenty of smaller rifts that consume whatever matter is unfortunate enough to be sucked near to their wide, angry mouths, but none so large that he feels the need to pay attention.

Eventually his patience wears thin. Hundreds upon thousands of years spent roaming with little to show for it have made him more bitter, vengeful—much more than ever before. He swipes withered fingers through a stunning nebula, and only then does something scratch at the distant edges of his consciousness.

A not-quite god; a spectre of hellfire and loneliness.

They call him Touya, and he burns with a supernova's power as he dances across the abyss, trailing sparks that soon fizzle into nothingness behind him. His transformation is incomplete, a mockery of what a true god is, but what a beautiful mockery he is. His light suffuses Tomura with warmth and purpose, and soon Tomura reaches out to pull him closer.

With the blaze of a dying star eating him from the inside out, Touya tells Tomura that the heavens are not worth saving. That the rest of the gods are nothing but dust beneath their heels. His disdain for the pantheon knows no bounds, and for the first time since the little lonely planet, hope blooms within Tomura.

Both quickly spill their tales of destruction and abandonment. Tomura lets slip the ache of being wholly alone, left behind by those supposed to guide him through the tumult. In turn, Touya's tale of being rushed too quickly to maturity bleeds into the miles between them.

Tomura swears that when he finds the god-eater, the ones who hurt Touya will be the first to fall.

Even so, his hope shifts quickly to joy as he and Touya spin through the cosmos, and then shifts into something like love even as Touya begins to push him away. He's insistent about it, fear masquerading as anger as his order for Tomura to leave rings across the heavens. Something is coming. Something big, Touya says, something he doesn't want Tomura caught up in.

Not long after, their black corner of the universe explodes with light and violence as Touya dies.

Except he doesn't.

Not truly.

Blanketed in darkness, a mottled mess of grey and violet wrenches out of the star's remains. It has Touya's face, but it's broken, mangled. The creature leers as it stumbles across the sky before settling at Tomura's feet.

Dabi, it calls itself: the hollowed, ashen shell of one who used to be so full of life.

It is undoubtedly Touya though—it remembers the god-eater, and it remembers their shared resentment. Tomura whirls around as Dabi skitters around their space, telling all sorts of tales about how they no longer need the power of something impossible to find. Faster and faster they go, around and around.

At some point, the shattered pieces of Touya's dead star are pulled into their orbit. Matter pools around them and in the distance, Tomura glimpses gods lining up with malice and fear in their eyes. Power shimmers around them, and Tomura thinks that perhaps Dabi is correct—they don't need any help to destroy those who have wronged them.

He pulls Dabi close, and smiles peacefully as they collapse into one another.

When they wake, melded together in a patchwork colossus, there's nothing. No light, no matter, not even a thought. Their world has narrowed to a void.

But then, far in the distance, a pinprick of light appears. It flies closer, and as it does, it stretches into a blinding thread that screams as it rockets toward them. More appear, piercing the darkness before they're crushed into nothingness. The twittering gods rain down through the gravity well and into the waiting mouth of a new god-eater, another beast created to chew through the cosmos.

Because in the cold, black wastes of space, death is inevitable—it's time the rest of the universe wakes up to that fact.

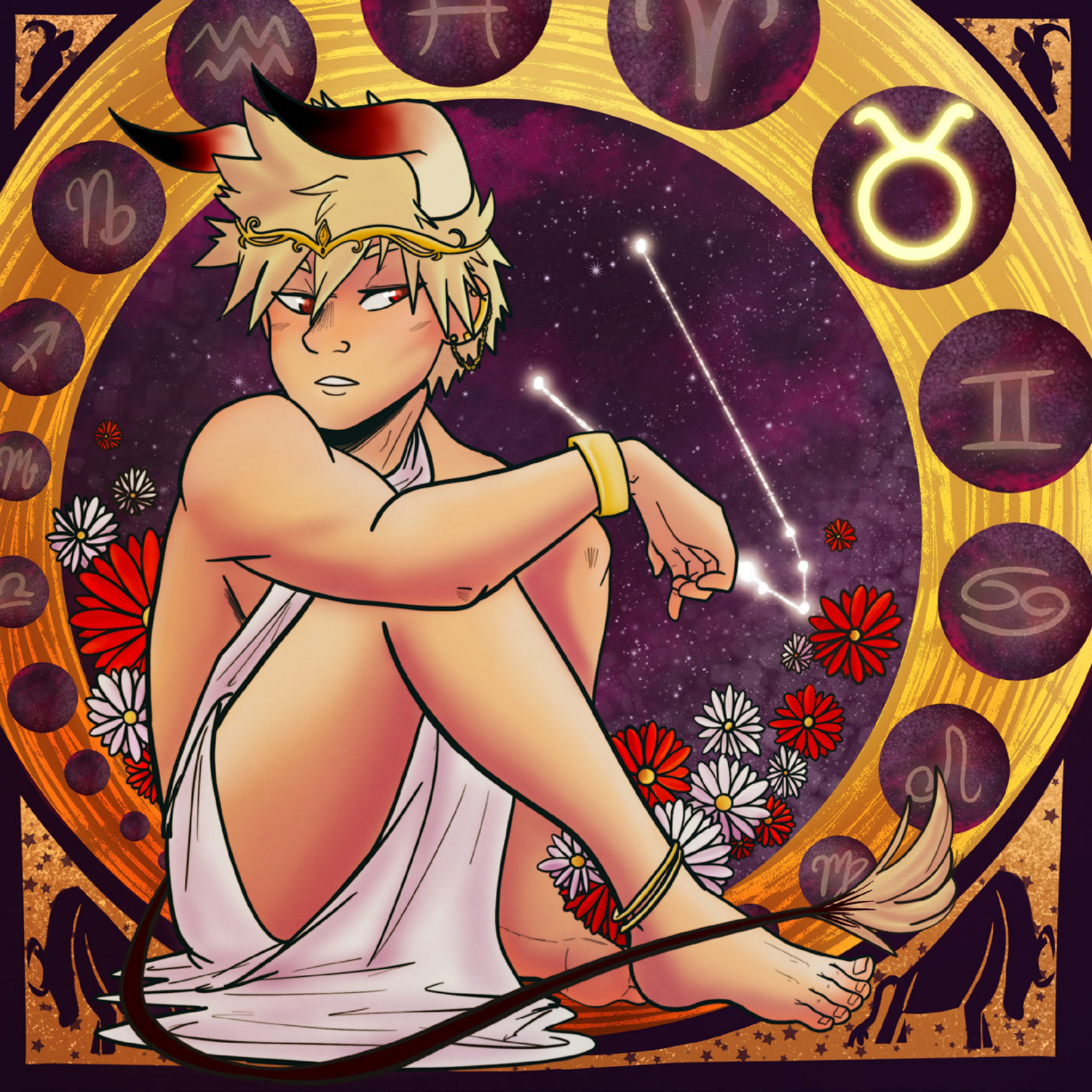
Fic written by thechaoscriptid ♦





TAURUS

APRIL 20 – MAY 20



DATES AND DESTINY

Katsuki hides a wince as he meets a wall of sound upon entering the dormitory lounge. Snacks are flying across the room—fulfilling a request? Starting a food fight? Maybe both? There's a racing video game on the big screen TV, and bodies are scattered all over the couches like nobody knows how to fucking sit like a normal-ass person. Three or four people are waving their hands around and yelling about 'compatibility' and 'personality', but it's hard to hear them clearly.

He considers leaving, but before he can, Kirishima glances up from where Ashido is waving a magazine in his face. His face brightens, his whole countenance shifting from one of mild confusion to glee as he waves at Katsuki.

"Hey Bakugou!" he calls, voice somehow cutting through the noise to reach him. "Check out this quiz!"

Considering he's just finished his homework, answering *more* inane questions does not appeal to Katsuki, but he has nothing better to do. Sighing, he walks over, not caring that he's blocking the view of the TV for several seconds. Deku squawks indignantly, craning his neck to see around Katsuki as he crosses in front of the couch, but Todoroki's the one who actually glares. It's over in three steps, though Katsuki's half tempted to stand there longer, just to make a point. But Kirishima is waiting for him, so he keeps moving, stepping over scattered kernels of popcorn, stray potato chips, and other snacks lost in transit from one couch to the other.

"Hey," he says, flopping down between Kirishima and the arm of the sofa. The space is limited, so he actually ends up halfway sitting on Kirishima. He pretends not to notice. "What's up?"

"Ashido was just telling me about the zodiac," Kirishima says, "I knew about blood type personality stuff, but using stars and planets seems way more complicated."

"It's not *that* complicated," Ashido protests.

As much as it pains him to admit it, Katsuki has to agree. "It's more variables than blood types," Katsuki says, "but I wouldn't say that makes it much more complicated. Just more precise."

Kirishima snatches the magazine from Ashido's hands and pokes it in Katsuki's face. "But can you really use it to figure out who would be a good relationship match for you?"

Katsuki leans back, but Kirishima keeps pushing the magazine closer to his face. Finally, he tugs the magazine away from Kirishima and holds it out so all three of them can look at it. "That's not what I use it for, but I guess you could."

Ashido titters. "Oh yeah?"

"Yeah," Katsuki taps the magazine. "I'm the type of person who decides things on my own. Something like the zodiac is a suggestion. I'll decide for myself whether or not to listen."

Ashido snorts. "That is *such* a Taurus way of looking at it."

"I never said it's *wrong*," Katsuki smirks. "I just prefer to keep my own counsel."

"So what would be a Libra way of looking at it?" Kirishima asks nervously. "I mean. I just found out about this stuff, but it seems useful."

Giving his own snort of amusement, Katsuki elbows Kirishima. "Relax. It's not like your future is written in stone. It's just a way to figure out what might suit you. Or you can just ignore it. Whatever."

Ashido nods, glancing gratefully at Katsuki. "Exactly! It's for fun, so don't worry about it."

"But even if you're using it for the purpose of fun, it can still be interesting. The Zodiac is useful for a lot more than just relationships with others!" Deku leans over the armrest, totally uninvited to the conversation but muscling in on it anyway. Apparently he and Todoroki have handed off the racing game to someone else, because Deku is now reading the magazine over Katsuki's shoulder, trying to tap one of the little text bubbles to make his point.

Irritably, Katsuki tugs it out of reach, but that just makes Deku lean on him even more until his finger reaches the page.

"See? It even says so right here—knowing about your sign can give you insight into your own personality and show you how to be a better partner. Or a better person."

"You guys seem to know a lot about this," Kirishima says, glancing sheepishly from Ashido to Katsuki to Deku, then returning his gaze to the magazine. "I guess I'm still not sure exactly how to use this information effectively."

Katsuki snorts in amusement. "Then don't," he says. "You're fine."

Kirishima ducks his head, avoiding Katsuki's eyes. "Ah," he says. "Okay."

He can tell Kirishima is deflecting, but he's not about to call him on it either. If he thinks the insight of stars have a place in his decisions, that's his business. Katsuki sees astrology

the same way he sees any advice—worth consideration, but easily dismissed in favor of his own experience or expectations. He never really cared enough to dig any deeper than what he learned from his mom in his formative years. He's a bit surprised that someone like Kirishima would actually worry about this sort of thing.

Implied compliment successfully deflected, Kirishima is once more scrutinizing the magazine, a soft crease in the space between his brows. Looking at him, Katsuki almost fails to smother the expression of fondness tugging at his lips. Kirishima's so serious when he finds something he considers important.

It's one of the many things he likes about Kirishima. Not many people have his level of passion. It's different than Katsuki's own drive, though. Kirishima finds his strength in the presence of others, he processes his ideas and decisions with heartfelt discussions. But it makes him an interesting conversationalist, and he doesn't easily back down from a challenging idea or topic. Katsuki likes that.

"So," Kirishima says, still eyeing the magazine, his eyes flicking over to Katsuki, "you don't believe this stuff? It seems pretty accurate."

"I don't *dis*believe it," Katsuki clarifies. "I just think I make my own way. It's basically advice, so I'll take it or leave it as I please."

Deku huffs with amusement. "If you *do* want to learn more, there's nothing wrong with that."

"I didn't say it's wrong," Katsuki snaps.

Deku gives him a *look*. "I just mean that not everyone ignores conventional wisdom in favor of barreling headlong down their own path."

Bold of someone like *Deku* to say that. The face Deku makes back at him proves that he's well aware of the hypocrisy and unwilling to retract his statement. Katsuki rolls his eyes. "Got any other questions?" he asks Kirishima.

"Maybe." Kirishima is still frowning thoughtfully at the magazine. "I'm not sure yet."

If he doesn't have any immediate concerns, Katsuki's not going to waste time hovering. Instead, he shoves Deku aside to flag down Sero, sitting on the opposite arm of the second couch. "Hey, my turn with the game. Pass me a controller."

With a mischievous grin, Sero launches it at Katsuki's head, nearly beaming Todoroki in the process. Once the game starts, Katsuki's too busy to pay attention to Kirishima's continued preoccupation with the magazine.



It's late, but not miserably so, when the soft knock lands on Izuku's dorm room door. He opens it to see Kirishima standing in the hallway, looking sheepish. A magazine is rolled up, clutched in one hand. Izuku recognizes it as the one he'd been looking at earlier that evening.

"Hey," he says, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. "I was wondering about... well, you seemed to know about this stuff," Kirishima shakes the magazine demonstratively. "Can I come in?"

Izuku steps back, opening the door wider so Kirishima can step in. "Sure," he says. "I'm no expert, but I'll do my best to answer what I can."

Kirishima nods, stepping in as Izuku shuts the door behind him. He stands awkwardly inside the room, so Izuku nods in the direction of his desk and chair. "You can sit there," he says, and Kirishima does, hands twisting anxiously around the rolled-up magazine.

Izuku sits on his bed and glances at Kirishima. He doesn't have to wait long before the magazine is finally reopened and Kirishima shoves it in his direction.

"I was wondering how to find out if you're compatible with someone," he says, not meeting Izuku's gaze. "I tried to follow the steps in the magazine, but..." he scrubs awkwardly at his bright red spikes, finally lifting his eyes to meet Izuku's gaze. His expression is painfully earnest. "I'm not sure if I interpreted it right, I guess. I could use some advice."

Izuku takes the magazine, glancing it over. He taps through the little questions in the quiz, which seems to be a mishmash of astrology and just a modified personality quiz. He sees that Kirishima has marked over it with two different colors. "What're the two colors for?" he asks, noticing that each color has a different zodiac symbol. "Yours is the red one, right?" It's the one that's connected to the sign for Libra, and he's pretty sure that's Kirishima's sign.

"Oh yeah," Kirishima says, a blush spreading across his cheeks, "I was worried the compatibility answer might be different for—" he cuts himself off, voice strangled. "Uh. Anyway, I don't want to go for it unless it's a good idea for—*that person*—too."

"So this other color is for the person you like?" Izuku asks, his eyes roving over the personality quiz before returning to Kirishima.

Kirishima nods, lips pressed together. At this point, his face is so red it nearly matches his hair.

Izuku can't help but notice that the other astrological sign on Kirishima's quiz is a Taurus. And that all the answers that Kirishima has provided for them are very... well. Kacchan-ish, if Izuku has to hazard a guess. It's obvious that Kirishima doesn't want to say it, though, so Izuku pretends he doesn't notice how *plainly obvious* it is that Kirishima is nursing a massive crush on Kacchan. It's cute, and Izuku doesn't want him to feel embarrassed. So he doesn't comment on it and simply reads through the quiz, following it through to the relationship recommendations on the following page. Kirishima has circled his advice and Kacchan's advice in the two different colors.

"They're not matching," Kirishima says, "but I wasn't sure if that was a bad thing or not? I worried that maybe if our results are too different, it wouldn't work out. And I don't want it to end badly, so. If it's not a good idea, we can stay just friends." He isn't looking at Izuku, his eyes fixed on the floor, shoulders tense.

"There's a lot of crossover," Izuku says, leaning forward to point out a few key sections in Kacchan's result. "See here, where it says that a Taurus needs a partner who can be flexible and patient with them when they're being stubborn, right?"

"Right," Kirishima says, leaning forward as well.

"And here," Izuku taps the one for Kirishima's result, "it says that Libras tend to focus on keeping the peace between themselves and their romantic partner. So that's a solid place to start from when you're thinking about a relationship."

Kirishima nods excitedly. "Really?" he asks, already sounding less anxious. "That's great! Is there anything else?"

Izuku can't resist smiling in response to Kirishima's eagerness.

Their conversation continues late into the night.



Todoroki and Deku are conspiring, Katsuki can tell. Deku keeps looking around with that smug look he gets when he thinks he's being secretive. The fact that he's roped in Todoroki is worrying, though. The icy-hot bastard is usually a stabilising influence, but he seems almost as self-satisfied as Deku. What the hell are they up to?

Katsuki waits for the other shoe to drop all day. It's agonizing. Deku and Todoroki are half-smirking at one another from the very first class of the day, and as the day drags on, Katsuki is wildly vacillating between pure rage at their little whispers, and self-immolating with curiosity every time they share a knowing look. *What* are they *up to*?

The few phrases he manages to overhear don't help. Todoroki says "Just shove them in a broom closet; they'll figure it out." Deku *blushes* and replies at a lower volume.

Katsuki spends the rest of English class trying to figure out why the hell you would shove someone in a broom closet. It would be a useless training exercise, and it seems like a terrible way to encourage neatness.

In math class, Deku says, "What if it seems like an accident?", and if Katsuki didn't know better, he would *swear* the two of them are plotting an assassination. This suspicion is only furthered by Todoroki's reply of "I don't think either of us are subtle enough to make that seem plausible."

Katsuki tells himself that trying to understand their plot is going to kill him long before their assassination plans get off the ground. But he can't stop eavesdropping when they make it so easy.

He's had enough by the end of the day, storming over to Todoroki, who trails a few steps behind Deku as they all head for the dorms.

"Hey! What the hell are you and Deku up to?"

"Planning a date," Todoroki says blandly.

Katsuki draws up short. "A date?"

"Yes."

"Like a romantic date," Katsuki says flatly, not sure if he's asking a question or not. Todoroki seems to take it as a question, though, because he answers again, "Yes."

"You and Deku are dating?" he asks, feeling thoroughly baffled.

Todoroki's eyes widen and he glances back over his shoulder at Deku, who stops walking and turns around with a deer-in-the-headlights look on his face. Both of their faces bloom red as they turn away from Katsuki to glance at each other.

Katsuki's half tempted to shove both of them into a broom closet and leave them there over the weekend. "Well?"

"Yes," Todoroki says, turning back to Katsuki, nodding decisively. "We are."

Deku makes a choking sound, clearly not expecting this answer. He doesn't look upset, though. Just surprised. He hopes the two aren't trying to stay closeted—is that what the broom closet is for? They're clearly terrible at hiding things, if Katsuki can figure out they're in a relationship over the course of a single day. And he isn't even *trying*.

At least he knows why they've been looking at each other like a pair of idiots all day. Mystery solved.

"Do you want to spar?" Todoroki asks then, apropos of nothing.

Katsuki blinks. "Why?"

Todoroki glances pointedly at Deku, then turns back to Katsuki. "It seems like a good idea."

Their afternoon training hadn't been particularly intense. Maybe Todoroki wants a bit more of a challenge? "I thought you were planning a date," Katsuki says, growing suspicious once more. Has he missed something?

"Yes," Todoroki says.

Katsuki waits for further explanation, but none is forthcoming. With an aggravated sigh, he turns and starts stomping in the direction of ground beta. "If you want to spar," he shouts over his shoulder, "find me on the training field." Even if half-and-half doesn't show, Katsuki can still work off some aggression before turning in for the night. After the stressful day he's been through, he deserves it.

He doesn't bother looking back again to see if Todoroki is following. He'll be throwing explosions around either way.



Katsuki has been tossing explosions around for a bit when he sees *not* Todoroki poke his head around a corner. He pauses, and waves Kirishima over.

"Hey," he says, toweling off the sweat on his brow and cracking open his water bottle, taking full advantage of the respite.

"Hi," Kirishima replies, shuffling his feet a little. He looks strangely nervous.

"So, did Todoroki send you to spar with me?" Katsuki asks.

Kirishima frowns a little. "Todoroki and Midoriya sent me," he says slowly, "but not to spar."

Katsuki waits for further clarification. Getting none, he sighs. "What, do they want a double date or something?"

Making a sound somewhere between a choke and a squeak, Kirishima reddens. "Something like that."

Katsuki silently waits for further explanation.

Fortunately, Kirishima continues. "I've been thinking a lot. About compatibility. Romance. Relationships. Good partnerships."

Katsuki scowls. "Don't tell me you have a crush on Deku or something, he and Todoroki are dating."

Momentarily derailed, Kirishima blinks. "Wait, what? Since when?"

"Since today," Katsuki says.

Waving his hand a little to dismiss the idea, Kirishima continues, "That's fine, I don't have a crush on Midoriya."

"You don't have a crush on Todoroki." It's not a question, but Kirishima answers anyway.

"No, of course not," Kirishima says, growing exasperated. "I have a crush on *you*, Bakugou."

Katsuki blinks. "Come again?"

"I know it's silly," Kirishima says, sharp teeth worrying his lower lip. "But reading that article made me think, and..." he clenches his fist, inhales deeply, then lifts his gaze to meet Katsuki's head-on. "I think we'd make a good match."

Katsuki considers the statement. "Okay," he says.

"First, because we get along well," Kirishima begins counting out reasons on his fingers. "Second, we're both very motivated and driven people. It's good to have someone beside you with a strong goal. Third—wait—" he cuts himself off. "Did you say okay?"

"Yeah," Katsuki says. "I like you. You like me, apparently. Why not?"

"Just like that?" Kirishima asks, sounding flustered.

"Just like that," Katsuki replies. "I don't need convincing."

"Oh," Kirishima says. He presses his lips together nervously. "Then can we... kiss?"

Katsuki feels a smirk tugging at his lips and doesn't bother hiding it. "I thought you'd never ask."



Crouched behind a bush, Izuku and Todoroki exchange a quiet high-five.

Turning away from the enthusiastically amorous new couple and eyeing Todoroki, Izuku asks, "We're not actually dating though, are we?"

Todoroki raises a solitary eyebrow.

Fic written by vulcanhighblood ◇





GEMINI

MAY 21 – JUNE 20



FAITH, SHOULD I TAKE A LEAP

Toshinori always thought that he'd die as a hero. That he would follow in the footsteps of his mentor, his predecessors, and countless other heroes before him. Mirai's vision of his future only solidified that belief, made it a certainty, made it fact.

Living to retirement is... odd. He imagined it to be different, freeing, like a weight lifting off his shoulders. But Toshinori has a promise to keep, a protégé to teach and prepare for the future. He has a funeral plan and a will that haven't yet seen the light of day, that he hopes won't be needed for a long, *long* while.

It's a different kind of terrifying, Toshinori thinks. It isn't the same as fighting villains, but there's still a cause-and-effect. Fail to apprehend the villains, and people will die on his watch. Fail to help his students better themselves as heroes, and people will die on their watch.

He loses sleep over it, and when he does manage to get some hours in, he sleeps fitfully. Dreams of being shackled to a chair as he watches his students dying one by one through a television screen. Midoriya, mostly, but Bakugou too. Todoroki, Iida, Yaoyorozu, and Kirishima—usually with the rest of the first years painting the ground a deep red behind them.

It has only gotten worse as more students move into the dorms. The shadows over his eyes are even darker now, his focus shot to hell from lack of sleep.

Even now, Toshinori lies in bed, awake; lights-out passed long ago. His eyes feel like lead, his entire body weighed down by the exhaustion that has settled in his bones. He knows what awaits him in his dreams; staying awake is better, just barely, and only because he can distract himself.

His phone is filled with apps now. Music and video streaming apps, games he hears his students talking about sometimes—Toshinori cycles through them until he can't anymore, until his body takes over and he's forced to sleep.

Tonight, he opens a horoscope app he found featured in the store. He has to dig through his emails for the scan of his birth certificate that he sent to UA's admin, but he manages to scrounge up the date, time, and place of his birth. And then, his horoscope of the day pops up.

You already know the right thing to do.

It clicks into place in Toshinori's head: he's getting nowhere, letting himself waste away with worry and fear when he could be using it to turn the situation around. To push himself to his limits, push himself outside of his comfort zone, in a way deserving of the UA's motto, to go beyond, *plus ultra!*

Toshinori does know the right thing to do; he's always known, always found himself lacking and did too little to remedy it. But from now on, he'll figure out how to do it.

He has nothing else to do anyway.

Seek advice from someone you trust to lend a new perspective to an old concern.

In the end, it's Aizawa he approaches. Yamada and Kayama are much more approachable, but it's Aizawa's bluntness he needs. It's Aizawa's unrelenting dedication to their students that he needs to lean on right now.

Aizawa sits across from him in the teacher's lounge, head bowed as he drinks the coffee that Toshinori prepared himself. Toshinori's cup sits on the table between them, untouched. He feels like he would spill his coffee if he tried to take a sip of it, hands shaking, unsteady as his foundations as a teacher.

He keeps his hands in his lap, clenching them into fists, then unclenching—rinse, repeat. He has a habit of fidgeting like this; he knows that. Aizawa probably knows it too, observant as he is, but he doesn't call Toshinori out on it, so Toshinori doesn't force himself to stop.

He gathers his courage in his heart, fills it little by little with the memory of *you're next*, of coming to his knees in front of Midoriya Inko, of the promises he made. Then, Toshinori starts off small.

"You've been teaching for a while now, yes?" he says, voice steady, just barely. Now, he forces himself to relax, curling his hands around his knees and keeping them there.

Aizawa takes another sip of his coffee. He doesn't look up, but he replies, "Yes."

"Did you..." Toshinori trails off, lips pursing. *Did you always want to*, he thought of asking, but that isn't the root of the problem. He might not have thought of it as a career before, but he wants to teach now, wants to be *good* at it.

Toshinori spent a lot of his hero career alone, with only a few friends he could consider close, and no one to mentor. Even Mirai was more of a companion, even though he was officially a sidekick.

He thought that teaching his successor would be easy, that it would come naturally to him like One For All did when he received it. But it hasn't been easy, and it hasn't gotten any easier.

Toshinori knows to save people with a smile, to push himself past his limits to help innocents even if it means destroying himself. He knows how to be a hero, how to save people and comfort them and tell them that *it'll be okay, I'm here!* But that isn't enough to be a teacher. That doesn't help him understand his students, doesn't make him into something more than just All Might in their eyes.

Aizawa is different though. Eraserhead is a different kind of hero than All Might was, working in the shadows instead of under the spotlight, sticking close to the streets instead of looking over the city up in the sky, preferring to stay anonymous instead of ending up on the news every other night. As unapproachable as Aizawa looks, he's the one who has to go undercover, who has to infiltrate criminal spaces and maintain contacts in the underground community. Things that Toshinori left to Mirai or Tsukauchi.

Perhaps that's what makes Aizawa a good teacher, in the end. Maybe.

"Were you always so good at it?" he finds himself asking instead.

This time, Aizawa puts down his cup, placing it on his thigh and keeping it balanced with a hand still curled around it. He looks up at Toshinori, and Toshinori meets his eyes squarely, doesn't let himself shrink away.

"Not really," Aizawa says, and Toshinori lets himself nurture the bit of hope that blooms in his chest upon hearing it. "I thought it was necessary, and I liked it when I thought I was actually getting through to some of my students. But I wasn't good at being patient, and I wasn't good at figuring out what exactly each student needed from me."

Toshinori understands. He can barely figure out what Midoriya needs from him sometimes, through no fault of Midoriya's, and his other students can be just as much of a mystery.

"How did you figure it out?"

"Time. Effort," Aizawa says easily.

And that should have been obvious, shouldn't it? Toshinori didn't get to where he was as a hero just waiting for something to happen. He had a propensity for his quirk and for hero work, but that doesn't mean he didn't work hard to be the Number One Hero. It should be the same for teaching. Still—

"It feels like we don't have time for me to catch up," he admits. Toshinori is an old dog learning new tricks. It's hard to let go of old habits, and even harder to learn new ones.

Aizawa seems to take pity on him, eyebrows furrowing, lips curling into something resembling a smile. When he speaks, his voice is low, warm. "It's your first year; it's supposed to be an adjustment period."

Toshinori wonders if this is how he talks to students who need reassurance. It works, he thinks. His smile comes easily, growing wider as his courage builds once again.

"Thank you."

Now is the time to make a change for the better.

He buys the book on impulse. *Teaching for Dummies*, found after an online search for *how to teach*. It doesn't cost much, about the same as an All Might plushie on the market, and Toshinori happily enters his credit card details into the website to buy it. It arrives the very next day, wrapped in discreet packaging. No one notices, and no one asks about it; everyone is distracted by the students moving into their dorms after all, making sure that they're all safe and comfortable.

Toshinori brings it back to his room, and he gets to work. Stays up late reading it, highlighting parts of it as he goes, taking notes and filling pages with ways he can apply the contents of the book to help his students.

He stays up until the sky starts to lighten and the birds start to chirp outside, until he's yawning more than he's working, until his eyes ache and he can barely read the text on the page anymore. His back cracks when he gets up to stretch, and relief settles over him, as warm as the sun peeking over the horizon.

Exhaustion is familiar to him. He knows the feeling of barely being able to stand on his own two feet, of coming home and barely being able to do anything more than get himself to bed, of waking up in the morning barely able to move, his skin more bruised than anything else.

This is a different kind of exhaustion. Mental, more than physical, but just as taxing, just as worth it.



Gym Gamma becomes as dangerous as a fighting ground when the students use it for their ultimate move training. There's debris flying everywhere, explosions echoing throughout the building every other moment. It's only through Ectoplasm's presence and the other teachers' unwavering attention that the training sessions don't descend into total chaos.

Toshinori has no place in there. He's supposed to be resting, given some leeway after his last fight and resulting retirement. He knows it's only out of consideration to him, knows there's little they expect him to do to help when he's still injured and basically quirkless.

But Toshinori has never been one to sit still, and he's never been one to give up. He's stubborn—maybe dangerously so, Mirai would say. He decides he would come to the ultimate move training sessions, prepares for it with a few more nights hunched over his desk, thinking of everything he's seen of his students so far. Having years of experience as a hero is good for something at least.

If he thinks of what it would have been like to work with his students, of what it would have been like to fight alongside them, not as they are right now, but what they could be in the future, as heroes—it's easier to figure out what they could do to better themselves. So they can be everything that they need to be, everything they could be.

He wants to see it, he thinks. Not just his students' potential, not just the foundations of their heroism—he wants to see them *be* heroes.

And Toshinori is stubborn. If he wants to see them as heroes, he'll try his very best to do just that.

It's time to give someone you love a word of encouragement. This will allow you to finally be able to realize your potential.

After the provisional license exam, Toshinori cooks katsudon. He uses a recipe that he got from Inko, even asks Lunch Rush for some advice. And maybe he plates it a bit sloppily, nothing at all like the neat bowl Midoriya usually gets at the cafeteria, or all the pictures online, but it tastes good.

Toshinori thinks so anyway, and it seems to be good enough for Midoriya too, who smiles so widely after his first bite that Toshinori feels it in his chest.

"It's good," Midoriya says. The words are muffled, but Toshinori only needs to look at Midoriya's expression to know what he means. He's an open book, Midoriya—just one of the many ways that they're alike.

"I'm glad. You've been working hard, so I wanted to make it for you," Toshinori says. "I'm proud of you, young man."

Midoriya starts tearing up, but Toshinori knows better than to get worried. This is not Midoriya when he's suffering under the weight of One For All. This is Midoriya when he's happy.

Toshinori reaches across the table to pat Midoriya's head, and cries with him.

Fic written by lauren ◇





CANCER

JUNE 21 – JULY 22



MERCURIAL BEASTS

8th in Aquarius, 6 Emperia XII

This morning, on the peak of Mount Tauria, as the blush of dawn spread across the sky and dappled the rolling fields that bleed into the Outlands, I thought of you and the night we first met.



14th in Libra, 4 Empiria XII

Izuku rouses with a splitting headache.

The air is thick—cloying and heady and distinctly like springtime, despite the autumnal colors that had long settled across Pyxia—and he wonders if perhaps the last several months have been a long, languid dream.

But he's not in his childhood loft, surrounded by well-loved woolen blankets and stacks of books he's torn through time before; nor is he shivering within the cool walls of the Alchemist's Keep. Rather, he's been swaddled in a mass of downy-soft furs and settled on his back. He hears it before he sees it—the thing that rests beside him, its chest rising and falling in time with the thrum of Izuku's heart. It breathes heavily, in deceptively beast-like tones. But Izuku can see the curve of its spine, the way its legs are folded together, the slightest wisps of blonde escaping the cloak that shrouds its head.

He grips the furs tightly, careful not to disturb the beast that sleeps beside him. Not daring to draw breath, lest he wake the thing, Izuku uses the moment to take in his surroundings. There's a crudely crafted arch of wood above him, knots of twine twisted around its form to connect to sticks that build a sort of skeletal dome around them. A tent of skins patchworked together with neat, precise stitches makes up the rest of the shelter. It's still dark out, Izuku observes, noting the distinct lack of warmth and light that should otherwise drip through the thinner patches of skin constructing the top of the dome.

It's only when he raises a hand to rub the sleep from his eyes, dropping the furs to press his other palm onto the earth for balance, that Izuku realizes the ground beneath them has been smoothed and covered with a thick layer of sweet leaves and moss.

The smell of springtime, he thinks, running a hand along the supple, makeshift flooring. "Aren't you a clever beasty," he murmurs, finally allowing his gaze to drift to the hulking man. The warrior rests on his side, curled into himself like a dragon intent to protect its treasures. He's bare-chested, clothed in a fur-lined crimson cloak and a heavy necklace of stones that rattle against his collarbone with every deep breath. Thick scars curl around muscles that bulge, even when lax. Izuku's fingers twitch with the urge to poke the creature, study its features, perhaps remove the hood that very nearly conceals spiking tufts of ash blonde. Something like recognition taps away inside his skull, but Izuku can't seem to figure out who he's looking at.

He shifts his legs without meaning to, and the thing snarls.

"Sorry."

He says it instinctively, and the beast growls low.

When it speaks, its voice is quiet and gravelly with sleep.

"We move at dawn. Go back to sleep."

Izuku dares to ask, "Who are you?"

The beast says nothing; he merely tightens his body. The slight motion causes the fabric covering his upper arms to slip, and that's when Izuku sees it.

The blood-red circle tattooed on his bicep, two curved horns protruding upwards from its shape. The Bull-god's mark—its placement and color unmistakably and undeniably attributed to the legendary Taurian knight, Katsuki Bakugou.

Izuku squeaks involuntarily, jerking away from the other man.

The knight heaves a tired sigh.

"Do I have any hope of getting the rest of my sleep?" he grumbles, and Izuku watches with fascination as he slowly twists upright, the planes of his muscles shifting enticingly under the smooth expanse of golden skin. "Get on with it then, ask your questions."

But the questions Izuku has been meaning to ask die on his tongue, as Katsuki comes to face him, seated cross-legged with the hood of his cloak no longer shrouding his features.

Furious eyes, clear despite the interrupted sleep, the same color of the bull-god himself, bore into Izuku with a kind of certainty that makes him feel small.

"You gonna fuckin' say something, Deku, or just stare?"

The knight, Izuku finds, is as rude as they say. He feels a pang of irritation lance through him as he flattens his mouth, trying to subtly shift the furs off of his form.

"Ass," Izuku mumbles and lifts his head, ignoring the way Katsuki's nostrils flare in response. He flashes his teeth in what he hopes is more of a grin and less of a grimace.

"Thank you for...what I can only assume was a rescue of some kind. I'm Izuku Midoriya," and he hopes that might be enough to satisfy the instinctual politeness his mother had drilled into him in years past.

Katsuki narrows his eyes.

"Well," he says slowly, "*fuck*, you can look a little less grateful. I do what the kingdom asks, from time to time. Protect what's theirs. Looks to me like you're precious cargo."

He nods his head towards the neatly arranged stack of Izuku's belongings. At the very top rests a yellowing leather-bound notebook with his name inscribed into the surface and the Pyxian seal in emerald green stamped just below.

"Alchemy is pretty valuable to the Capitol," he comments, tilting his chin, "which makes me wonder how an ill-prepared weakling like you wound up all the way out here—"

"Okay," Izuku bristles, willing the flush creeping up his neck to vanish, "first of all, I don't know where *here* is, secondly, I'm not *ill-prepared* you jerk, I've been traveling with a group of alchemists towards the capitol—"

"Nowhere to be seen when I found your sorry ass," Katsuki mutters, leaning back on his haunches.

Izuku glares.

"I'm sorry, I can't completely remember what happened, but since you seem to have the answers, care to enlighten me?"

"Gladly."

Two hands curl tight around his biceps and hoist Izuku from the comfortable cocoon of furs he's been working his way out of.

"Brute," he bites out, but Katsuki is already dragging him out of the tent and shoving him haphazardly into the darkness.

"Tell me where we are, alchemist," he growls low, and Izuku shivers, the cool night air seeping into his bones.

He doesn't recognize their surroundings per se—but something about it feels familiar all the same. Faintly luminescent moon-blossoms spring from the ground, their spicy scent hanging thickly in the breeze. The clearing they stand in melts into a heavy brush of trees, foreign shapes flitting through the gaps of branches and leaves. He can barely make out mountains in the distance, their frosted tips bright against the black sky.

Izuku drops into a crouch, ghosting his fingers over the blooming petals of the nearest moon-blossom, twining the stem around his digits, and plucking it from the ground.

"Moon-blossoms in Pyxia release a softened odor when they've been harvested," he remarks, leaning in to breathe in the scent of the newly-picked flower, "they were alchemically altered two centuries ago because the emperor at the time found their natural smell too distasteful and strong."

He's acutely aware of Katsuki's gaze as he rises and twists to face him, offering the bloom beneath his nose. It's almost comical, the way Katsuki's eyes widen with slight surprise.

"Go on," Izuku says encouragingly, shaking the flower forward.

The larger man rolls his eyes and huffs, but inhales deeply nonetheless. His eyelids flutter shut, and, if only for a moment, Izuku is struck by how the shadows of his lashes fall across the tops of his cheeks.

Startled by the stray thought that he has no business thinking, even in passing, Izuku yanks his hand back and clears his throat.

"Natural moon-blossoms on the other hand," he says hurriedly, refusing to meet Katsuki's gaze, "still emit a strong, spice-like scent that intensifies when their stems are broken. And those moon-blossoms only grow outside of Pyxia, in the Omniastrum territories. So that means...we're in the Outlands."

A shudder rolls through him at the thought, a spike of fear that lodges itself inside his chest like a twisted curse. Long forbidden to explore, the Outlands are a danger to any Pyxian, regardless of status or ability. Even a knight, no matter how noble, falls outside the kingdom's protection should they find themselves in the outer territories. There are too many stories, too many painful legends of heroes and gods lost to the violence reaped beyond Pyxian soil.

"Fairytale," Katsuki cuts in, fixing Izuku with a strange look, "you talk without realizing it, Deku."

"Sorry," Izuku says unthinkingly, and he's certain he can feel hot blood in his cheeks and the tips of his ears. "It's a habit. And it's Izuku. Not Deku."

"Your journal says 'Deku'," Katsuki replies mockingly, crossing his arms over his magnificent chest - *oh for fuck's sake, shut up.*

"Only if you're incapable of reading," Izuku shoots back. "And here I thought the kingdom required their staff to be educated. Or is that just the rule for alchemists?"

"Have you ever felt the steel of a blade forged by the Pyxian Warrior clans?" Katsuki says mildly, his eyes alight with challenge. "Worth studying, if you really care to learn about the elements."

"Bully."

"Shithead."

"Cretin."

"Cretin that saved your delicate little ass from bandits, mercenaries, outlanders—"

"Okay," Izuku cuts in and thrusts his hand forward without another thought. "You did and I'm grateful. Truce until you get me back home?"

Katsuki looks down at his outstretched hand in disgust.

"Sorry, fucking *what?*"

Izuku's eye twitches.

"I said I'm grateful," he grinds out, lifting his chin to look Katsuki squarely in the eyes, "and I think we should call a truce until you get me back to the Alchemist's Keep."

"What makes you think I'm taking you all the way to the goddamn capitol?" Katsuki asks incredulously, a delightful growl tearing from the back of his throat.

Shut up shut up shut up.

Izuku's lips curl into a smile and he gestures to the tent behind them.

"Precious cargo, remember?"

I kept a journal entry of that night, did you know? I sketched your form, an unsightly, hulking, divine creature, breathing so deep it rattled the bones of the tent. The drawing was titled 'tempestuous thing', and I thought it very clever at the time.

Our travels only proved it to be true.



21st in Libra, 4 Emperia XII

It's impossible to ignore the stiltedness in Katsuki's stride as he limps ahead of Izuku, bleeding sluggishly from too many wounds. Red smears, reminiscent of warpaint, decorate his chest and arms, the dark stains nearly imperceptible against the maroon cloth of his pants and cloak. He's been silent for the last hour, and Izuku has let him, given that when last he inquired about Katsuki's well-being, the knight unleashed a volley of curse words so foul Izuku wondered if perhaps his ears would fall off should he cross the threshold of any holy place ever again.

They've been traveling for a week—far longer than a straight path to the Pyxian border should be, but Katsuki had insisted that with Izuku in tow, their best chance for survival was a pass that went around the forests of the Outlands, avoiding natural enemies, but likely steering them into Outlander encampments. Katsuki's confidence in his ability to get them through safely was high. Izuku's, less so.

The first few days of travel were exhausting, but uneventful. The foreign terrain was disorienting, and the environment was so unfamiliar and fragment, Izuku found himself battling a slew of migraines throughout their long hikes through the Outlands. Katsuki was stern and cool, only occasionally allowing Izuku to pause and collect samples of wild herbs and spices. Izuku would never say it, but he felt a sweet swell of warmth bubble up in his chest at every unnecessary pitstop.

Perhaps, he thought, the knight is only mostly as rude as they say.

It's only when they near the border that the true dangers of the Outlands make themselves known, in the form of an ambush by an encampment of Omniastrum wildlings.

Katsuki senses them first, his ears pricking and eyes widening, a hand clamping over Izuku's lips and effectively silencing him mid sentence. Izuku huffs angrily, but waits nonetheless, yelping when Katsuki grabs his wrist and pulls him forward, into the nearest thicket of trees in their way. It's the closest the knight has appeared to being panicked, Izuku notes.

"Ka—"

"Shut up."

"But I—"

"Outlander Wildlings, Deku," Katsuki hisses, shaking his head, "will not give up once they've sensed proof of a living thing. You stay here until I come back."

"Wait, Katsuki, I can help, I promise—"

"Fucking hell, I said *no*," and he says it so frostily, Izuku can't help but recoil. "Stay put. I won't be long."

And to his credit, it's true.

Katsuki, for all his attitude and belligerence, has proved a trustworthy defender, and Izuku hates to let anyone down.

So he waits.

Ten minutes.

Twenty.

Thirty.

An hour.

If he strains his ears he can almost hear the clatter of metal, the break of bone and the burst of the blood, the violent shriek of a wound being made, someone's sword having created a new holster.

When he hears a rustle in the bushes, he swallows his panic, and as promised, there emerges Katsuki, stoic and splattered with scarlet in a way that's almost beautiful, his cloak gathered tightly around his form.

"We need to move," he says brusquely, and without a word, Izuku traipses off behind him, eyes drawn to the strong line of Katsuki's broad shoulders, that seem, for some reason, heavier than usual.

There's a crimson mark on the back of his neck, and with a short, "*hold still*", Izuku licks his thumb and stretches out his fingers to rub the stain away.

Katsuki jolts, his back stiffening just as Izuku realizes the mark is smeared blood from a still-bleeding wound.

"Are you okay?" Izuku asks softly.

Katsuki grunts.

"I've had worse."

"Not really what I asked."

"We're losing daylight."

"You're losing blood," Izuku replies pointedly.

"I'm losing my patience," Katsuki barks, and Izuku rolls his eyes.

"Stubborn ass."

"Nosy dick."

They trudge forward, until Katsuki releases his hold on the folds of his cloak, and Izuku can clearly see blood dripping down his rib-cage, unpleasant slashes that don't look terribly deep, but certainly painful all the same. Izuku asks if he's in pain and Katsuki explodes through gritted teeth.

It's only when the moon is high in the sky, and Katsuki's limp has become undeniably pronounced, that Izuku puts his foot down.

"I'm tired," he announces and halts in tracks, right at the mouth of a cave bathed in moonlight.

"Tough shit," Katsuki says sullenly. "We need to keep moving."

"We need to sleep. You need healing."

He reaches out and hesitates for a moment, trying to gauge the hazy look in Katsuki's eyes, when the knight finally croaks, "Do it."

And with that permission firmly in his grasp, Izuku reaches up and unfastens the cloak from Katsuki's bare shoulders.

The air smells metallic, tinged with the scent of Katsuki's blood, his wounds raw and undoubtedly stinging in the cold. Katsuki never flinches, not when Izuku spreads his cloak out along the dusty cave floor, nor when he's guided down to his knees and asked to lay on his back on top of the fabric while the other man rustles through his bag and begins retrieving supplies.

"I'll have to clean your wound first," Izuku mutters, setting aside vials and bottles and the journal that Katsuki insists reads 'Deku' in obvious lettering, looking more determined than Katsuki has seen in the last week. "I think I can use this to staunch the bleeding, this to prevent infection, and this to promote fast healing. And if I make a poultice with these two and heat it up, we can prevent scarring—"

"Leave the scars," Katsuki says hoarsely, raising a hand in protest. "Scars are a symbol of strength. Survival. Victory. Every scar I have is an enemy I've defeated."

"Big man," Izuku says dryly. "Like you're not a symbol of strength without the scars."

Katsuki's lips twitch in amusement.

"Think I'm strong, Alchemist?"

"I'm not blind, Knight," Izuku shoots back coolly, but if he's being honest, his heart is so far up his throat, he fears he might vomit it clean, bright pink and still beating furiously. "Your 'symbols of strength' precede the observation of any scar you might bear."

"Wow," Katsuki marvels, "quite the fucking compliment."

"You're delirious."

"You have scars too," and he tips his chin towards the fingers that are currently unstopping a glass bottle.

Izuku pauses and draws his hands back self-consciously.

"I've had a lot of accidents in my time training to be an alchemist," he says stiffly. "Hardly a testament to my strength or victory or survival."

"Why not?"

"Because I was clumsy and unthinking and...it doesn't matter. The point is, I wear these as a reminder to be smart and precise. Not like a badge of honor," Izuku says heatedly.

"Are all children of the crab-god so sensitive?" The knight quips, suddenly in a puzzlingly pleasant mood.

Though it might be related to the heady herbs Izuku has been crushing right beside him.

"You've never met a Cancer-born before?"

"There's not an abundance of diversity in the Eastern villages," Katsuki shrugs. "Most of

us are blessed by our patron god-parent to have children under the same stars. It's how we yield persistently strong offspring, future leaders for our clans."

There's an odd sting Izuku feels when Katsuki says 'offspring', the bite of jealousy he isn't prepared for.

"Interesting," he says passively. "Roll onto your front, please."

He makes short work of Katsuki's injuries, dressing them gently, but quickly, less in the mood to chat than before. It's strange, really, the tied up affection he's begun to feel for the surly knight. For what reason, Izuku can't say.

I sketched you again that night, sleeping with the lines of your face scrunched, open and vulnerable in a way that was certainly mine, and mine alone, to enjoy. Sharp ridges and hard lines, you slept like you had something to protect. I titled this one, 'wildling by starlight'. With the splotches of herbs and poultice across your chest, bandaged clumsily to the best of my ability, you resembled a creature from the Outlands.



1st in Scorpio, 4 Emperia XII

The cross into Pyxia is smoother than either of them hoped it would be. They stumble out of the woods and suddenly they see it, the first Pyxian outpost glimmering against the bright blue sky. It's a clear day—a good omen from the ruling god—and Izuku feels a heaviness lift from his shoulders.

"Holy *shit*," he exclaims, and Katsuki smirks because of all the things for Deku to take from him, a foul mouth seems to have taken the quickest. "We made it, Kacchan."

And his smile drops because *goddamn, what a stupid, diminutive nickname*. Katsuki fucking Bakugou, Taurian Knight favored by the Capitol, strongest warrior across the Eastern and Northern clans, for all his ferociousness had been so casually dubbed 'Kacchan', like an adopted puppy.

"Let's get you to the outpost and have you on your way," Katsuki says gruffly, slapping the shorter man on the back and ignoring the ball in his throat. His chest feels tight, like he's about to be ill. What he wouldn't give to be home already.

Izuku's smile fades.

"Aren't you taking me to the Alchemist's Keep?"

He tamps down on the sadness that seeks to break from his tone.

"There's no real reason for it. The outpost will have the best resources to get you back safely and quickly," Katsuki says evenly.

"Well..." Izuku hesitates. "What if I want you to take me?"

Katsuki sighs.

"Deku, you're not making any se—"

He's cut off by the press of uncertain lips against his, pillowy and unhurried and hopeful all at once. Scarred fingers, clever fingers, delve between the folds of his cloak, digging into his arms purposefully.

What else can Katsuki do but close his eyes and breathe deep, that torturous summer breeze and parchment and ink, impulse and affection so punishing and sweet.

He's not sure how long they stand there; long enough for him to flex his hand and settle his palms at Izuku's waist, as nimble fingers twist into his own hair and pull him closer, all-consuming and insistent.

But eventually, limbs untangle and breaths are drawn and lines are stretched between, cutting into the space so desperately sought and shared.

"Take me to the capitol," Izuku commands, and really, what can Katsuki do but agree?

At the Pyxian outpost, Katsuki uses his clearance to obtain their passage via portal from one outpost gate to another, landing them a half-day's journey from the Capitol and the Alchemist's Keep.

Izuku is unusually silent. Katsuki is the same.

Their hands remain tightly clasped, fingers intertwined the whole way to the Keep.



Remember the first real argument we had? I offered to assemble the tent when we camped near the Pyxian border last Autumn, a year after we met. You stood and watched me, fuming with every poorly twisted knot and bent stick, before you stormed over and snatched the whole set from my hands, vowing to do it yourself. Bull-headed, stubborn, tempestuous, wildling behavior.

I drew you while you worked, hunched over and full of fury, oafish fingers tying delicate knots I've ruined so clumsily time and time again.

I titled the image, 'mercurial beast' and thought myself clever.

I still think myself clever, for having won you over.

Hurry back soon, I miss you always.

Yours,

Izuku

Fic written by bluerene ◇





LEO

JULY 23 – AUGUST 22



A KING OF BEASTS

The Leo showed up several weeks after the fight with the Nomu—

After he came face to face with the man who had dubbed himself *Dabi*.

The last time Enji had seen the great leonine spirit he was in his last years of middle school, struggling to find his sense of self within the stifling and cruel domain of his father's household. He had been coming into his flames, burning so brightly and burning himself out with his own lack of direction -

And the Leo, the embodiment of the sign he was born under, the great beast whose guidance is Enji's right through birth, had stepped into the space where a father should be.

He had trusted what the spirit had told him. He'd trusted that he could be exactly what the Leo promised: a leader of men, a shining star—the *best of anything he tries to be*.

When he closes his eyes he can almost remember the first time the beast had spoken to him. Enji had been young, on the softer edge of twelve. Small for his age. Struggling to find the balance between stifling his flames to extinguishing and burning the world down around him, struggling to be *himself* in a society not suited to a boy born too dangerous to be merely contained or taught.

There had been whispers of putting himself down like an animal. He *should* have been put down like an animal; a single wrong decision made by a twelve year old was liable to leave everyone caught in his rage dead.

He'd been afraid. He'd be lost.

The great leonine *thing* had slunk into the ashen ruins of his childhood hideaway when he was at his lowest, unsure of even his right to *breath*. The great beast, wreathed in fire born from the collapsing matter at the center of stars, with a maw of fangs and flat, cold eyes that told Enji as much as he needed to know of who in that place was *prey*, had stepped forward and done what no being in his life had. He asked Enji *what do you want to be*.

And he wanted to be one of the *greats*.

He'd fallen so far short of his goal. Touya showed him that.

No - Touya had tried to show him that a long, long time ago.

Dabi had finally made him see that.

Now, decades later, Leo paces the edge of the altar room. His flaming tail lashes behind him with each drag of his massive paw. Enji watches from the corner of his eye as he kneels and lights the incense. Fuyumi must have changed it out recently; the sticks are long, and he settles his weight on his heels.

He lays his palms flat on his knees and finds himself in silent conversation with a man he once thought of as only the ghost of a mistake.

Enji doesn't do this often; the altar had remained, but the pain was also too fresh, too raw, to contemplate in the years since Touya's passing. He'd refreshed the offerings, he'd spent years memorizing his son's face, but he'd never done this.

Sat.

Thought.

"You told me that I would be great."

Leo shifts from the pile of furs and fire that he'd poured himself into at the corner of the room. His great leonine head rises up, the flames of his form dull and almost smoldering. "I said you would be great."

"And I tried to be. You told me I would be great, and I pushed myself to be the *best*, and for what? For my sons to hate the legacy I tried to build?"

Huge claws curls against the tatami mats. They shift, barely, more a sign of Enji's sheer determination to make the creature corporeal than any true sense that the thing resides on the same plane as mortals. "I said you would be great. I did not say that you would be the best - nor did I say that you would be the best *hero*. That was a dream you chose for yourself."

"What else could you mean by greatness?"

"Do you not see the value in being a good father? A good husband? A good leader?"

"Succeeding All-Might—"

"Lost you all of that." Leo looks out the window, bored of a conversation he must have had with thousands of disciples. "I gave you passion. I gave you ambition. It's not on me that what you saw with that was a singular goal and not the meaning of *greatness* as it could have been."

"You gave me this without explanation, without guidance." He stares into the flat blue of Touya's photographed eyes. "You told me I would be *great* and when I strayed, you provided me no guidance to lead me back to the right path."

His son was an Aquarius—an air sign born with a fire quirk. Clever, exceptional, utterly wild—but it should have been a sign. He should have known. He should have been careful.

He shouldn't have let his ambition burn his son.

A nose as hot as banked coal nudges against his shoulder. The threat of red fangs sinking into the soft meat of his neck sends shivers down Enji's spine, but he doesn't move. To show *fear* to the Leo is the kind of mistake a man does not recover from - he may be the shining star of the Zodiacs, but he is still *a lion*. "You demand far too much of me, Enji Todoroki. I am to *guide* those under my star, not lead them. If I did that, I would hardly be making leaders myself, would I?"

He can see embers falling from the spirits' mane. They burn black marks into the floor.

"He was my son."

Enji feels the Leo leave. The room is colder with it gone.

He stares at his son's face and feels the gaping emptiness of his loss finally fill his chest.

I should have been better.

I could have been better.

He breathes, shuddering, and feels his flames flare and roil under his skin.



He is not a Gemini, led under the twinned star. He burns his way through the world; he doesn't leave things behind to wonder after.

But that means he's sitting at the table, his children kneeling at their places, wondering what it is he hasn't destroyed of his family. His words are stuttering and cold; he can't remember the last time he asked Fuyumi about her class or Natsuo his studies. They stare down at plates of food Fuyumi made and offer nothing to him.

He's not even sure he knows how to apologize.

He can see the water caught in Natsuo's hair. Had he spoken to the Cancer before he'd come? The crab was a feature of Natsuo's childhood, skittering, swollen body forcing its way into Enji's home no matter what he did to keep it out. Touya's death had put a stop to even that—he hadn't cared enough to stop it anymore.

Enji dredges up what he knows of the Cancer as his daughter starts to talk. She asks about his last exams - Enji had forgotten them, Natsuo hadn't mentioned them—about friends he's made.

Enji thinks about the Cancer's inner circles. *Loyal for loyalty, in turn.*

He stares at Natsuo. Natsuo stares at his plate.

He sighs.

The diner crawls by. Natsuo helps his sister clear the table. Fuyumi leaves the dishes on the counter; Enji would leave them for the maid that comes in after he leaves for work, but he's been trying to do better. The last time he did the dishes he broke three plates and a

cup. This time, if he's lucky, he'll still have most of the set left.

He watches his children filter out of the room. Fuyumi is going back to her room. Natsuo has a long drive back to his university if he wants to get to class on time.

The tips of his fingers feel like they're freezing off. Is this what it is, to fail to live up to what he should be? This gaping coldness in his chest?

He's never been lost before. He's always known exactly what it is he has to be.

If he turned on the television, he'd see a news show proclaiming him Number One. He'd see anchors praising his visage. A world looking up to him.

He feels the fire in his chest, banked and unlit.

Never once in his life has meeting a goal ever left him feeling so unlike himself.

Enji feels more than hears the Leo prowl the edges of his dining room. He hears the hiss of water meeting fire; when he looks he sees the spirit crouched in Natsuo's place at the table, steam rising up from where he's burning away the Cancer's water. "Do you see it now, Enji Todoroki?"

He swallows, and his mouth tastes like sand and sour food. "I do."

"Then what will you do to fix it?"

He looks over the empty table. He feels out the cold in his chest, his fingers, the tips of his ears. "I don't know."

The Leo blinks at him, gold eyes burning. "Then you do what those under my care have done for millennia: you try."

"Will that be enough?"

"It will have to be. You are like me, and we do not settle."

The cold wraps around his throat, choking him, but he feels the pit in his stomach loosen. This, too, is his birthright under the Leo: a goal, and the knowledge that he could meet it if only given the time.

He'd kept his place as the Number Two hero in Japan for well near a decade, against younger, stronger, far more personable, and arguable *popular* heroes, despite damn well not deserving to be in that spot—

He could be better.

He can *learn* to be better.

He can become the man his children needed him to be.

The Leo does not tell him he's leaving. He walks out, paws burning black shadows into the Todoroki's floor, and they both know he'll be back. Some people, after all, need more assistance than a simple sign can give.

Fic written by Muse ◇





VIRGO

AUGUST 23 – SEPTEMBER 22



THE SHACKLES OF YOUR SOUL

Yaoyorozu Momo is five when she first meets the Todoroki family. Of course, she's known of their standing long before she's ever stepped foot into the ballroom, but she'd not known the kind of people they were. Not then.

That, her mother had explained, as she'd sat Momo down and had the family's maids comb through the smooth, silken strands of her daughter's hair, is something she could only learn from seeing them in person.

The scent of bright chrysanthemums and pale, dark peonies is strong, yet not quite overpowering, as the flowers are carefully set atop the swell of her bun. Her mother dusts off her shoulders and ties the obi behind her back, and then carefully leads her down to the gala.

To Momo, whose hands are buried in the small folds of her sleeves, her first impression of their guests is this: the Todoroki hold no love for one another, and what little remains threatens to crumble under the weight of their own anger.

The matriarch of the family is kind, but quiet, her smiles tremulous and paper-thin. Her husband, large and menacing and red, red, red, is an imposing presence. When her mother and father introduce her to the two, she holds her mother's kimono and hides behind her legs. The nods they give her only make her want to hide further. She ducks her head and waits until she's no longer under their cool, frigid gaze.

Todoroki Touya is the eldest son, his hair white as snow, his eyes the color of sapphire flames. Though his smiles are small, and his words still soft, Momo can tell that there is a volatile fire within him, desperate to burn, burn, burn. When her father laughs and encourages her to dance with him, she is afraid. For him, for herself. She does not know why, but she tries to understand, all the same.

Todoroki Fuyumi and Todoroki Natsuo are different. The eldest daughter is cool to the touch, but her shy giggles and excitable nature encourage Momo to open up. She talks about family, and futures, and siblings, and Momo wonders what it would be like to have a sister like her. She tells Momo that she's welcome to visit, but Momo is not sure the rest of her family will agree.

Natsuo, easygoing, amicable, and carefree, manages to complain about the stuffy suits and tedium of the event itself, as he leads Momo through the room. She almost trips over her own two feet, but she is learning how to read people, and Natsuo, for all that he does not care, is an excellent teacher.

He points out other guests, milling around. The woman who owns the mill and keeps misplacing her wine glass. The husband with the folded pants cuffs who keeps on chatting up the waiter. The son with the gold cravat who is on his phone instead of partaking in the festivities. Explains that there are tells that Momo can read or stories she can fabricate. That there are ways to confirm what she thinks, but the best ones are usually the most direct.

And then, there is the youngest child. Todoroki Shouto, almost a year younger than Momo, who stares with wide eyes from his corner of the room. Momo has to tug at his wrist to encourage the boy to step forward. Talk about family and point out people and stay quiet, still, to convince Shouto to relax, and then to dance in slow circles around the room.

He, Momo comes to find, is the only member whose eyes are not guarded, and whose words are not careful and clipped. His thoughts are plain, and honest, and real, and it is enough for her to breathe a sigh of relief. At least she is not the only one out of her depths, though she would never admit such a thing.

And, yet, there is something dangerous brewing amongst the Todoroki family, this Momo understands. As for what exactly it is that causes them to be so weary, so *wary*, well. Momo is still far too young to realize.



When Todoroki Enji and his family leave the Yaoyorozu estate, Todoroki Shouto is the only one to look behind him. Momo waves and the boy waves back.

She does not know this, yet, but this is the last time she will see Shouto's face unscarred.



When Momo is six, she learns the art of business at her father's desk. She learns to read and to write, as Father pours over reports and shows her the clauses and turns of phrases that make a contract set in stone. "When you want to set the terms of a *deal*," he tells her, placing emphasis on the word enough that Momo knows there is more to what he is telling her than the things on the surface, "you must always take care to make them favorable to both parties."

And Father's daughter, still young, still impressionable, swings her small, dainty feet beneath the thick skirts of her dress, and asks, "But what if the things you wish to split cannot be shared equally?"

The man laughs, light and airy, and states, "It is not that the terms *cannot* be equal. It is that you have to make them *seem* that way. Because the most important thing, when it comes to business, is this: do not take a contract without profit, but know that not all profits will be physical, tangible things."

She tilts her head at the advice, but absorbs it all the same, her hands eventually moving from beneath her legs to settle atop her father's papers. Her eyes skim the pages, and she watches her father as he hums and nods and works from behind his desk.

Several months later find Momo sorting through the piles from order of importance, dates and deadlines and shaky script that make her curious enough she'd be willing to ask her father about them. Instead, she bites her tongue, adds up the numbers, and reports their earnings.

"Everything looks accurate, Momo-chan," he praises, bringing up a warm hand to rest atop her head. She smiles, her cheeks hot, as a warm feeling rises up within her. "In fact, I would go so far as to say you don't need my help at all, with these!"

Momo is young and Momo is dutiful, and her father is pleased. His own fingers wrap around her hand to hold the fountain pen steady, and she practices, slowly, slowly. She watches him, at first, before attempting to mimic his script, and he watches her copy her father's signature, after that.

In this time, Momo learns to sign his name, before she learns to sign her own. First in kanji, then in Cyrillic, then Arabic. English follows, after, and the pressure of ink on paper becomes steady and smooth. Chinese, Sanskrit, Tamil. New languages, new characters, new knowledge.

Momo's favorite, she thinks, is cursive, where the "Y" and the "M" of her name loop into each other, their whorls rising and falling like the roll of fog through mountains. The feeling is almost as familiar as a brush on rice paper, the strokes of ink forming poetry beneath the guidance of her tutors.



Father tells Momo she works hard and works well. Observant and eager, happy to please.

"Be careful not to work too hard, though, dear. Others will take advantage of your skills, where they can."



At seven, Momo's Quirk manifests as the power of Creation. Though she knows nothing of the chemical makeup of other things, Momo wants to learn. Her initial puddles of flesh become clay pots and figurines. Her blood becomes water and her bones become metal.

Not a day goes by where Momo doesn't find herself at her family's library, a variety of books on anatomy, chemistry, and engineering scattered around her. Though her tutors are bemused, they do not question her sudden interest. Momo has a habit of finding new things to learn and keep her busy, and it is to be expected that she wishes to learn beyond her current faculties.

Several weeks into her research, however, results in Momo admitting that her Quirk had manifested, and that she was interested in perfecting her technique. The family tutor, kind and learned, sighs in fond exasperation, and explains that Momo should take care of herself more.

"It's all well and good that you've something to show your parents, Yaoyorozu-san, but I am certain they would rather see you just as pristine," he scolds. "Those black bags under your eyes will ruin your complexion!"

And Momo, still young, still hungry for knowledge, places her hands on her hips and puffs up her cheeks. And, quite plaintively, she complains, "But, I'm so *close*!"

Her tutor pinches the bridge of his nose, sighs, and pulls out another medical text. This one, in regards to one's physical and mental well-being. "Be that as it may," he explains, handing her the book, "I would feel better knowing that you are taking care of yourself."

“But!”

Seeing his student prepare yet another rebuttal, he thinks better of the lecture and, instead, adds, “After all, your Quirk will depend on the state your body is in, no?”

“... Oh.”

It is only after the sleepless nights and skipped meals and subsequent intervention that Momo begins to realize that it is not knowledge and control, alone, that can shape creation. Though she’s taken to scabbed-over wounds and small papercuts to help add material, she’s forgotten what it means to rest, and relax, and allow her own body to settle.



“My Little Genius!” Mother exclaims when Momo presents her and Father with an elaborate marble statue of a maiden draped in loose silk, formed over long weeks and longer periods of exhausted rest.

The woman holds out a beige rose, her eyes shining gold in the dawn’s early light. And, though her father has a proud gleam in his eye, and her mother is in awe as she rushes over to embrace Momo tight — “*M-Mother!*” — Momo can’t help thinking it is not enough.



Her father slowly reveals more of the Yaoyorozu Clan to Momo before she’s turned eight.

By then, Momo has become used to the luxurious lifestyle that comes with her social standing. Her posture is prim and proper, her gait elegant and agile. She is able to dress herself in ceremonial garbs for whichever occasion should arise, and paint her nails in the colors of the seasons. Her makeup is elegant, her jewelry conspicuous and clear.

Though Momo is still young, the top of her head has reached her father’s chest, and the slant of her eyes makes her appear a woman five years her elder, if not more.

“My darling little genius,” her mother muses, clipping a cloak over Momo’s shoulders. A maid continues to dot the back of Momo’s wrist in ink and fragrance, while Momo, herself, smiles as she reads through another sheaf of papers, grasped tight in her other hand.

“I’ve yet to take the exams, Mother,” Momo insists, though pride still swells in her chest at the praise. “But, I shan’t let you down, all the same.”

Her mother hums, and her father takes this moment to return to his office, where Momo is still sat atop his desk, legs crossed and lips pursed. “Oh, I know you won’t, Momo-chan.” He places a large, heavy hand on her shoulder, and she leans into the touch, content. “But, you are so, so serious, my dear! Do not let work take over your life so soon!”

A huff escapes her. “But, there is so much to be done! Far, far too much to leave it all to you, Father.”

The head of the Yaoyorozu places a hand beneath his chin, and crosses his other arm. He looks to her mother, then back to Momo. Something wordless almost seems to pass between them when he turns to Momo, and asks, “Well, since you have been checking my reports so often... why don’t we take a look at some of our less-known stock?”

Momo, still as curious, still as practical, watches Father pull out scrolls sealed with wax red as blood, and can't help the way her fingers tingle in anticipation. Her eyes, as always, shine like dark diamonds.



At eight, Momo learns to take stock of firearms and ammunition, and does not yet realize that others do not do the same.

By the year's end, however, she knows the names of dozens of hidden safehouses, thousands of people whom hold some kind of influence over the world, and what the true meaning of yubitsume is.



Momo is nine when she learns that to survive, she must eat. Her Quirk requires more than just rest and rejuvenation to function, and is useful for far more than simple works of art. She can create scaffolding stronger than steel, clothes sturdier than leather, if only she knows of their composition. Though her latest tutor in a string of men and women whom have disappeared through some means or another does not understand her drive, nor her prowess, she asks the woman to stay, all the same.

By ten, Momo is confident enough to birth staffs and spears from her skin, and takes to the family's dojo to practice. Her body, honed under the watchful eye of physicians to be as healthy as can be, is not yet used to muscles required to be swift, and agile, and strong. It takes time for Momo to learn how to run without feeling lead settle at the back of her calves, or to move her body into the swing of her motion, or use a weapon as an extension of herself.

She is eleven and showcasing her Quirk to other Elite families, the flutter of her sleeves like the rustling of leaves in autumn. She is eleven and learning to breathe through a mask, in a room devoid of light and people, with her father's encouraging words resonating like static in her ear.

Eleven, as she smiles in Todoroki Shouto's direction, and does (not) ask about the scar over his face, or the absence of all but his father for the meeting between the Yaoyorozu and the Todoroki.

Eleven, and growing into her own.



She does not like remembering the years between then, and fourteen.

Or, perhaps, cannot, for just how much of herself she had given to her duty to her family, and all that it entailed.



Momo is fourteen when she learns to hold a gun in her hands and knows just how lethal it is.

It is not something she expects to ever use, in the same way that she had never expected her interest in her father's work to lead to forgery, or her accounting for her father's wares to lead to keeping track of arms deals. But Momo is nothing if not curious, eager to learn, eager

to please. The heiress to the Clan of Yaoyorozu, where wealth and promise and success are not only expected, but celebrated.

Hers is a family built from love and care. Practical, sensible, where the shelves are always clean and books are collected like a dragon's hoard. A family that Momo is loyal to, because she trusts her mother and father, and trusts that they know best.

Is it any wonder, then, that Momo welcomes the tutors who return to her, bringing with them stories of distant lives and distant shores? That she learns to bandage their wounds and treat their ills, and becomes as cherished as the head of the family, her *father*, is?

Because, in the end, Momo is a protector and a lover, first and foremost. Because, when she learns she wants to help, her father sees the possibility for more. Because, when she learns she wants to fight, her father ensures she cannot be taken down.

Because, when Momo travels to her father's warehouses to ensure shipment is running smoothly, she gets caught in the crossfire between the people she knows and the people she does not. And though the flames swelter and the embers burn, and burn, and burn, Momo learns to adapt, and save, and overcome.

The power of Creation helps her rebuild the casing. The slice of a knife against skin ensures perfectly smooth, rounded bullets. And the sharp of her eye, the bane of her breath, guarantees that when she takes this shot, it will not miss.



Momo takes her first life at fourteen. Or, at least, the first that she knows of. It is but one of many, that night, but it is the first that saves her father's men from a far more terrible fate.

When she returns, her father hugs her, but Momo is still in shock at what she has done, but... it does not take long for her to let her tutor, scarred, shaking, and terrified, hold her hand as the both of them have bright, fiery chrysanthemums emblazoned onto the back of their necks.



At fifteen, Momo is engaged. Or, as close to engaged as she can be.

It is not until fifteen that her mother thinks Momo mature enough to carry on the family name, or far too mature, already, and growing more and more so with time.

"In today's society, people will talk, my darling little genius girl," she explains, as she helps bandage Momo's back, still aching, still bleeding, as her skin attempts to knit itself over the scars made from needle and ink.

"Better," Mother says, as she covers the peonies bursting from the hollowed-out bones of the zugaikotsu in the middle of her back, "that you can speak the truth, and build your life through your alibi, from there."

Momo simply bites her lip and asks, "But what of Father's work? What of the Family, and the maids, and the tutors, and—!"

"*Shhh.*" Momo watches her mother pass several more bandages around her breasts, until

the black and gold dragons silhouetted in a wreath of cherry blossoms and ocean spray are hidden away, their wisdom and their virtue for her and her, alone, and sighs. Mother places a hand on Momo's shoulder, where a bruise is still healing, and states, "You will be fine, Yaomomo. There is nothing for you to fear."

Momo spends a few minutes wrapping the kimono around herself and placing bright chrysanthemums into her hair. She paints her lips with light gloss, brushes fragrances on the folds of her neck and under her wrists, and ties her obi tight.

A maid leads her towards the yard where Endeavor and his son wait. Momo blushes and bows and goes through the motions, but she is glad to see that Shouto is still as uncomfortable with the ceremony as she can be, when it comes to people her age.

Momo seats herself before moving to pour the tea into clay mugs. The boy across from her reaches for the cup, but barely curls his hand around it before hissing and pulling away. She catches it before it spills, but she can't help noticing the bandages around his fingers. Still fresh, still burnt.

"Sorry," he says, instead of replying to the glance she sends his way.

Momo nods. Whispers, "It is alright," though her eyes do glance at the table where her father and his are sat.

And here, Momo can't help thinking, as she oft tends to. About heroes and about villains. Protecting and being protected. Hurting and being hurt. Thinks, her father would never harm her. Not if it was not Momo who had put herself in harm's way. Thinks, if her father is a criminal, what does that make Endeavor's own family?

Todoroki Shouto is young in the way Momo is young. In the way that neither of them are, or can be. Not now, not ever.

"Is there worth to being a hero?" she asks him.

And Shouto, scarred, and quiet and alone, alone, alone, insists, "There has to be."

What he doesn't say: that it is not enough, to own the title. Not enough, to be born into a legacy of greatness. Not enough, to want, and wish, and hate.

What she thinks: that she's done far better things in the name of her Family than his father has done in the pursuit of his valor. That even a virgin's delicate arms can strangle a lion before he's had a chance to bare his fangs.

Momo breathes out, and places the teapot down. She stretches out a hand, and lets Todoroki Shouto see the curve of a phoenix's feathers blazing like fire down her forearm, and sees the way he blinks, slowly, before he comes to the realization.

"Then," she offers, and smiles when his own arm comes up to clasp her wrist, "let's become the kind of people others can look up to."



At fifteen, Momo makes a promise to herself, and it threatens to upend her world.

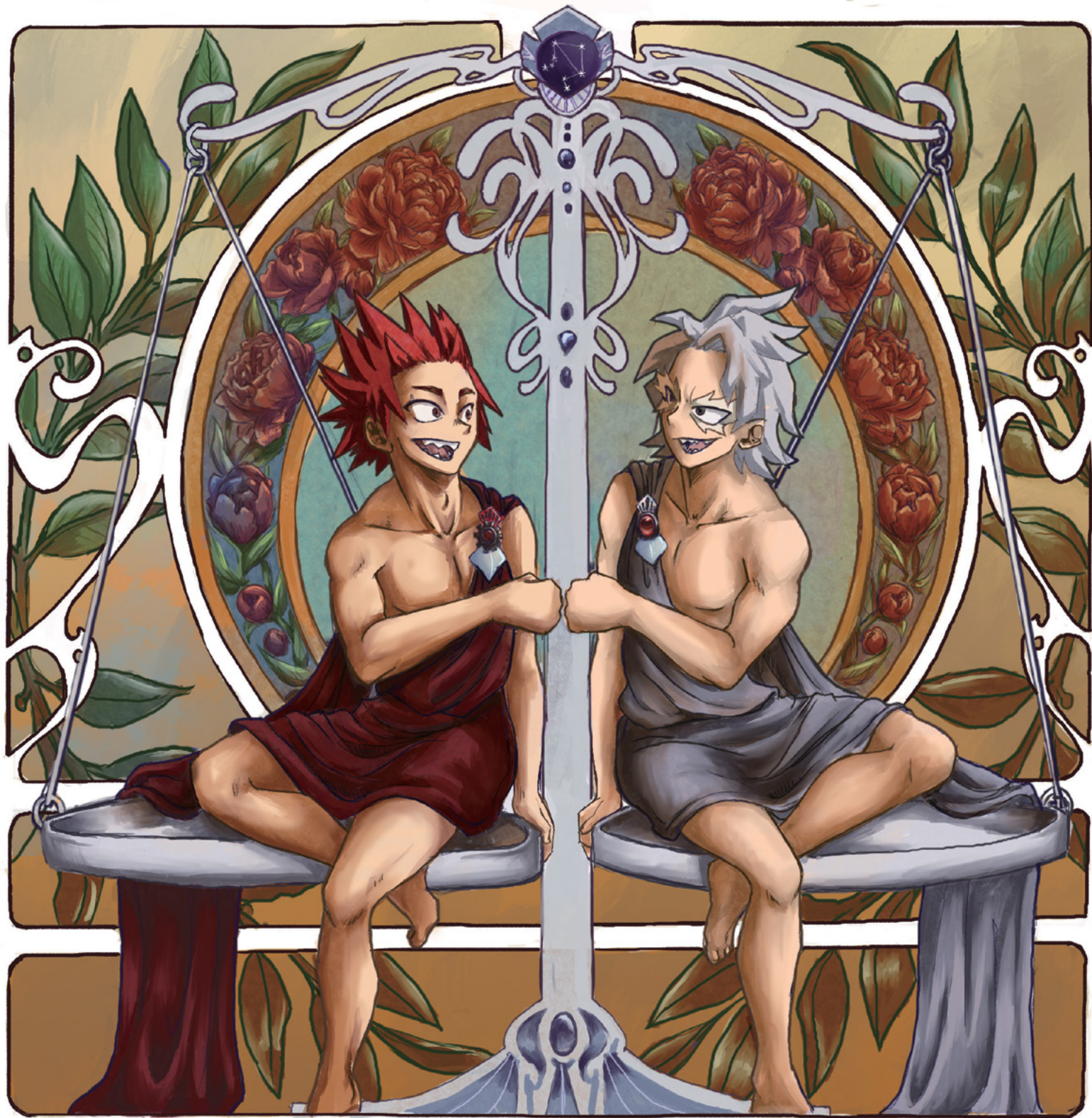
Fic written by WishMoon ◇





LIBRA

SEPTEMBER 23 – OCTOBER 22



PERFECTLY BALANCED

As he gets to the last question, Kirishima clicks his tongue against his teeth and looks up to smile gently at the third year girl in front of him. She's pretty, he thinks, but not really his type. And not the type of this guy she's been telling him about either.

"I'm sorry, Kotetsu-san," he says, and tries not to wince when her bright orange cat ears droop a little. "This just doesn't look like a very good match to me."

"You're sure?" she asks, wringing her hands in front of her chest. She sounds so hopeful and Kirishima really does hate crushing people's dreams. But not every match is one made in heaven, and he shakes his head.

"Positive. It might start out okay but I can't see it lasting very long."

Kotetsu sighs and hangs her head, but a moment later offers up a sad smile. "Okay, I understand. Thanks anyways."

"Anytime," he says, and closes his matchmaking notebook. Just in time too, as the bell chimes, signaling the end of lunch. The upperclassman leaves quickly back to her own room, and Kirishima turns in his desk. Izuku, Mina, and Kaminari are all sitting nearby to watch, Kaminari enough seats away that he might not even have been paying attention, and Izuku the closest. Unsurprising; Kirishima usually has an audience of some kind when he does his matchmaking thing. Some of his friends think it's really cool.

Others think it's a 'load of complete bullshit'. But then, Kirishima *did* finally get Izuku and Katsuki together, so he thinks maybe the blonde should have a little more faith. He's also responsible for Iida and Ochako's relationship, as well as a handful in the grades on either side of theirs.

"Poor girl," Izuku comments idly.

"Yeah, but at least she didn't actually ask that asshole out," Mina says with a wrinkle of her pink nose. "He sounded like a complete dick."

Kirishima agrees with a laugh. He hadn't said anything to Kotetsu about it but...well, the answers her crush had filled out on the questionnaire had not been inspiring.

Over the past year, Kirishima thinks he's really perfected his whole matchmaking thing. It had started out idly when a few people had asked his opinion on burgeoning relationships and, after weighing everything out in his mind, he gave fairly accurate predictions of how said relationships would unfold. From there, when even people from other classes came to bug him

about relationship issues, he'd developed his own set of questionnaires to gauge both potential and ongoing relationships. In the process he's made something of a name for himself. The Academy's Matchmaker.

It's a silly title, but Kirishima is proud of it anyways.

"Hey, can I have a couple of those sheets?" Mina asks, tapping his desk. "I've got my eyes on a couple of underclassmen. You can do a reading on three people right?"

"Cradle-robber," Kirishima teases, but pulls two of the pre-printed questionnaires out for her. "Of course I can."

The papers were so common in school now that everyone knows what they look like and what they're for. It's almost seen as a right of passage to be asked to fill one out, either by someone with a crush or a friend of said crush passing it along.

Fortunately for Kirishima, even with the questions being public, nobody can weigh the responses quite like he can. He's not really sure *why* that is exactly but likes to think he's just that dedicated to seeing all of his friends happy. Or maybe he's more in tune to the emotions of others? Has good role models for a healthy relationship in the form of his parents? Or possibly a combination of all three. Regardless, he has a skill and he likes using it.

"I thought you said you like...pictured a scale in your head when you do this," Izuku says curiously. "How can you weigh three people against each other?"

"By making it a three sided scale I guess?" Kirishima says with a shrug. It can't be that hard.

"Cause he's the best, duh," Mina chimes in, and Kirishima grins wide at her.

"Yeah, except when he comes to himself. Sorry, was that mean?"

It does get a small wince out of Kirishima, but he waves Izuku off. "It's fine, man. It's only the truth."

The bell chimes again and both Izuku and Mina glance up, then move back to their seats.

For whatever reason, Kirishima simply can't weigh himself the same way he can everyone else. His mental scale gets stuck, not swinging one way or the other. It's very frustrating and also means his love life is practically non-existent. There's someone he's had his eye on since they were first years, but he hasn't had the courage to say anything without the results of a matchmaking to back him up.

Kaminari props his hip against Kirishima's desk, startling him, and leans over in a way that blocks out most of the rest of the room. He's going to get yelled at if he doesn't get back to his own desk soon but it's not like Kirishima will ever object.

"Hey, come by my room later? I wanna try this matching thing," the blonde says, tone light but voice hushed so that it doesn't carry to anyone else.

Kirishima falters, then swallows hard and tries not to let the distress that washes over him show.

"Sure, but you know you have to actually like someone first, right?" he replies, trying to keep his tone equally as light. Just two friends talking. Nothing all that important. And he hopes for a moment that maybe Kaminari is just being stupid and forgot that you need two people to complete a match test, because then it means Kirishima won't have lost his chance.

But the blonde's mouth just ticks up on one corner and he winks. "Don't worry, got that covered already."

Kirishima smiles woodenly back at him and tries not to feel like his stomach just fell out from under his feet. "Okay. Um, they'll need to fill out one of."

Kaminari waves an errant hand. "Nope. I know him well enough to answer for him."

Him.

The smile on Kirishima's face feels tight and unnatural. Who the hell does Kaminari know so well that he can answer the detailed, personal questions for him? A childhood friend Kirishima's never heard of, maybe? Or, god forbid, one of their classmates? Kirishima may have to transfer if Kaminari starts dating one of their friends right in front of him. The heartache would be too much.

"Cool, come by after dinner then," he says, voice sounding distant. Kaminari gives him a little thumbs up in agreement, then promptly gets yelled at by Aizawa for being out of his seat.



It takes a long time for Kirishima to build up his nerve to actually go to Kaminari's room. He spends at least twenty minutes perched on the very edge of his bed, trying to give himself a pep talk. It's fine if Kaminari has a crush on someone else. It's fine if he knows this guy super, super well. It's cool. Most of the match tests come back negative anyways. They're probably not compatible at all!

Kirishima feels kind of shitty for hoping his friend, his *crush*, hasn't met the love of his life or something. That's probably super selfish of him, but he can't really help it.

Tapping his notebook against his thigh, he takes a deep breath then knocks on Kaminari's door. It swings open almost instantly, like the blonde has been hovering on the other side waiting for him. His smile is lazy but genuine.

"Dude!" he says, waving Kirishima in. "I thought maybe you forgot!"

Kirishima laughs weakly. "As if. I just got caught up in something. So..." He doesn't really want to be the one to bring it up. Maybe if he asks Kaminari about the latest game he bought they can play that and forget all about the stupid matchmaking stuff...

"Take a seat, man," Kaminari tells him and Kirishima has never hated his stupid role as matchmaker more.

The chair at the desk is covered in clothes—clean, Kirishima hopes, but there's no telling with Kaminari considering the state of the rest of his room—so he perches himself awkwardly on the edge of the bed. The blankets are in a big lump by the pillows and the sheets are warm and kind of scratchy against Kirishima's palm as he adjusts himself.

He's sat here before. He and Kaminari are friends. Possibly even best friends. They hang out in each other's rooms all the time. But Kirishima is feeling hyper aware of every little thing right now, like how when he sits down he can suddenly smell Kaminari's scent on the sheets. All electricity and sunshine and the BO of a teenage boy. It makes him feel a little dizzy and he forces himself to flip his notebook open and pull a pen from the spiral, ready to make his assessment.

Kaminari throws himself on the bed next to Kirishima, bouncing a little and leaning back on his hands. He's still smiling, completely relaxed, and Kirishima has to swallow hard and look away.

"So how does this work?" the blonde asks, swinging his legs a little.

Kirishima clears his throat and tries to fake a smile of his own, but he feels like it comes out wrong. "We go through the questions together and I weigh your responses against his."

"Cool," Kaminari says, and leans over to snag a piece of paper off his messy desk. It makes his shirt ride up a little, revealing a pale strip of flesh just over his hip. Kirishima tries not to stare and fails. He clears his throat again once Kaminari is sitting up again and tries to get down to business.

"Right, okay, so let's start from the top. Obviously I know your quirk, but what about this mystery guy of yours?" It's supposed to come out playfully, like a friend teasing another friend over a crush. Instead he just sounds kind of strangled and he winces.

Kaminari just laughs at him. "No way man, I'm not telling you that! It'd give away who he is in an instant!"

It takes a moment for Kirishima to process that, but his stomach churns uncomfortably once it does. So it's someone he knows then. Someone who's quirk he'd recognize without any difficulty. He clears his throat and tries to play it off like that isn't a complete bombshell of a revelation. "Okay, weird, but whatever man. Guess I'll skip the questions about year and class then. How about hobbies?"



Normally, Kirishima's match tests only take twenty-ish minutes to complete.

Kaminari's takes an hour. He has *so much* to say about this crush of his. He *gushes* about him, his answers for each question getting lengthier and lengthier, until Kirishima almost spaces out trying to listen to him. It's almost unbearable.

Who even knew Kaminari was so in love with someone?

The worst part is though, that every step of the way Kirishima can see how great of a match this is. Whoever this guy is, he has great chemistry with Kaminari. They have similar interests, compatible goals, and a strong friendship bond already in place, which is always the best foundation for a relationship in Kirishima's experience. They even have a similar sense of humor and, according to Kaminari, friend groups that won't clash, though the question makes the blonde laugh for some reason before he answers it.

To put it shortly, it's a match made in heaven.

Kirishima stares down at the notebook in his lap and everything he'd written down, but doesn't see a word.

He should be happy about this, right? This is his best friend, apparently in love with someone who's going to be a really good match for him. At least, according to Kirishima's metrics. The paper crinkles under his fingers when they turn to claws and he forces himself to relax.

Happy. Right. Friends are happy for their friends.

Kirishima clears his throat and once again pastes his best attempt at a smile onto his face. It comes a little easier this time when he looks up into Kaminari's expectant face. There's...

something there. In his eyes. Like he's waiting on more than just the results of the test. But Kirishima isn't in a place to try and figure that out right now, so all he says is, "Congrats!"

There's a beat of silence before Kaminari clears his throat lightly. "So...it's a good match then?"

"Very good," Kirishima says, closing his notebook and sliding the pen back into the spiral. "The best I've ever seen, actually." It pains him to admit, but he just keeps smiling.

Kaminari practically beams at him. "I knew it!" he cheers, bumping his shoulder into Kirishima when he bounces a little on the mattress in his excitement.

At least he's happy. That's the important part, right? If Kirishima really loves him, then he'll let him go so Kaminari can be at his happiest. Because that's what you do for the people you love.

Kirishima clears his throat. "So uh...do I finally get to know who this guy is?"

Kaminari cocks his head to the side, blonde hair sliding across his face. He wrinkles his nose, still smiling, like he thinks Kirishima is being stupid but still funny. "Isn't it obvious?"

"If it was I wouldn't be asking," Kirishima says, words coming out a little harsher than he'd meant them. It makes Kaminari roll his eyes and bump their shoulders together again.

"It's you, you idiot."

"...Huh?"

Another eye roll, and this time when Kaminari leans into him he doesn't let up. He smells like ozone, like static and sunshine and whatever he had for dinner. "I was talking about you the entire time, Ejiriu." Kirishima's first name slips nonchalantly from his lips, intimate. "How do you think I was able to answer the questions so easily? I don't know anyone else like I know you."

Kirishima's brain is refusing to fire properly. He swears he's dreaming.

"Huh?" he says again, and this time Kaminari laughs at him.

"You know, for the past year or so I thought maybe you had some kind of hangups you weren't mentioning, and that's why you hadn't asked me out or made a move? But then Izuku made that comment today about how you can't weigh your own relationships on your little mental scale and it kind of clicked into place. You're an idiot for that, by the way."

"I'm not an idiot!" Kirishima fires back on reflex. Then, "I mean, I just...I couldn't tell, you know? If we'd be good."

Kaminari rolls his eyes for the third time that night and Kirishima wonders if he's going to get tired of it anytime soon. "You *are* an idiot. Of course we're going to be good together. It's *us*."

And really, when he puts it like that, the whole mess really does seem so simple. Kirishima's barely daring to breathe lest this all dissolve, but not even in his dreams can he come up with the way Kaminari leans into him, his hand on Kirishima's thigh, the twist of his mouth teasing and amused just before he kisses Kirishima.

On instinct, Kirishima reaches up to touch Kaminari's face. He's warm, his mouth hot and sweet and electric and everything Kirishima's ever dreamed about.

He doesn't notice when his notebook falls out of his lap and onto the floor, forgotten.

Fic written by scribespirare ◇





SCORPIO

OCTOBER 23 – NOVEMBER 21



PRESENT ZENITH

"Hello, listeners, and welcome." He croons into the microphone, mouth barely a hairbreadth away, Shouta can tell; he can practically feel the host's lips on the skin of his ear. "Tonight's episode of Present Zenith is a brought to you by Astraesus."

Shouta lets himself sink into his covers, or tries to, just barely paying attention to the chatter ghosting through his earbuds. For whatever reason, ever since discovering *Present Zenith*, he can't seem to fall asleep without Present Mic's exuberant one-sided conversation.

Well. Not that he could fall asleep before, either.

Chronic insomnia's a bitch. He's tried every supplement and medication known to man. Melatonin, chamomile, zolpidem, benadryl—you name it. No one does it like Mic can. And when Shouta *still* can't sleep, he listens to the man on repeat until the sun comes up and he has to roll right back out of bed again. *Present Zenith* is good company and a better distraction.

"Longtime listeners will know I'm a homebody." Longtime listeners such as Shouta, who discovered the show when it was still on fawn legs, unsteady and barely functioning, buried beneath the big guys of the podcasting world. "I know, I know—but what can I say? I'm a cancer!"

Shouta still remembers those early days, when Mic was a little less sure of himself (though not by much) and the audio quality made it sound like his big mouth was constantly full of peanut butter. He was clearly an amateur, but still Shouta was devoted in his listening. Now, with a microphone fit for a professional recording studio, an eclectic following of nearly a million, and sponsorships to boot, Shouta feels an odd streak of pride knowing he was among the first of *Present Zenith's* supporters.

"So, I'm really extra glad to be back from vacation. Don't get me wrong, listeners, I love the excitement of travel! And I just love the culture there! It's so amazing! But it's great to sleep in my own bed again."

Shouta can empathize. He can barely beat the anxiety and hypervigilance at home, let alone in a strange place. His yellow comfort item that goes everywhere with him, and his insistence upon listening to the same stranger talk (about astrology, of all things) every single night, are proof of that.

"Anyway! I got a lovely pair of red oven mitts while I was away, so I've been baking a lot since I returned—I know it's only been two days, but I've baked a few batches of cookies and a pie

already, and I've got some . . . questionable croissant dough resting in the fridge right now. Let me tell you, my kitchen is an absolute mess! I hope you don't mind tonight's episode is inspired by that, listeners! It's been giving me thoughts of the signs and baking styles!"

Pop-astrology is Mic's favourite thing to talk about, and personal anecdotes make up the majority of the show, these days. In the beginning, the show started out rather seriously, but as the years went on it became more lax and casual. Shouta doesn't mind. Mic is way more in his element this way. Sure, Shouta came for the astrology (admittedly, expecting astronomy), but he stays for the host.

"I'll start with Aries and Taurus. Maybe you're thinking, Mic, why are you doing Aries and Taurus together? They're totally different! Well, listeners, I think when it comes to baking the two could actually be similar. They're both eating the cookie dough right from the bowl. As many of you know, my mother has her sun in Taurus, and she has an amazing recipe for pie crust—that's the recipe I used for my pie today, and it's delicious—and she eats the raw crust. It's absolutely disgusting. It's like eating butter right from the foil. No offense, Mom."

Shouta used to love raw dough, when he was a kid, but it's been years since he's had any. Maybe he should pick up baking. . . .

"And Aries—listeners, no offense; I love my Aries listeners—I think a lot of you just don't have the patience to make the recipe and wait for it to come out of the oven. That's why Aries are either cheating with the pre-packaged stuff, or you're eating it raw. If you're an Aries with a successful bakery, please let me know! I'd be so interested to hear. Oh, but, anyway, as I was saying, you can understand what I mean, right? Listeners, Aries and Taurus are either going to be the best baking buddies, or it's a disaster—there's no in between. If you're on the cusp, well, good luck! Next, Scorpios—and, listeners, you know how much I love Scorpio. They're counter-sitters, but you can't even be mad about it."

Shouta nods off at some point, deep into the night. The next thing he knows, the sun is blinding him through the crack between his curtains.



Hizashi is two steps away from total meltdown mode.

Mr. Roach is *ruining* his day—no, his *life*.

Hizashi sucks on his teeth, phone pressed to his ear as he hops from one foot to another in an attempt to have as little contact with the floor as possible. "Please pick up, please pick up, please pick up—"

It goes to voicemail. Which is not exactly surprising, given that he has already called twice with no success, and the current time is 6:30AM on the dot.

One of Hizashi's feet, clad in red slippers for protection, is tucked under his knee like a flamingo trying to twerk. He has to pee—badly—but there's no chance in hell he'll leave Mr. Roach unsupervised.

Mr. Roach is a literal cockroach, appropriately named in an effort to make the insect seem less scary than it is, but . . . it's not really working. He's pretty sure he's heard that roaches can live without a head, which is absolutely terrifying.

Pffft! That can't be real.

Right?

Suddenly, he's taken by the visage of Mr. Roach as some kind of dragon-hydra, twenty feet tall, each severance of its head causing new growth in the doubles. It's not a pleasant image.

Mr. Roach has made its home on Hizashi's bed, skittering over his pillow like the most horrid abomination known to humankind, and Hizashi dares not move from his station.

He does not move. He does not pee. He does not blink.

The hour-long wait for pest control to arrive is gruelling.



Shouta likes his job. He really does. It's just hard to feel enthusiastic when he wakes from fitful sleep to another day of the same exhausting shit. It's not the job that drains him; it's just the condition of his existence.

His mouth tastes sour. His eyes scream at him to stay closed—so dry they burn. His uniform feels stiff from hanging to dry, the spot where his name used to be long since faded from bleach in the wash.

If he looks like shit, so be it.

As he turns the ignition, the company van rumbles to life. An old podcast episode is already connected, Mic's voice turned down to a low hum that nearly blends into the engine sounds.

Shouta turns up the volume so he can make out what's being said through the old van's crappy stereo system. This is routine.

"... for Scorpio! I have a Scorpio second cousin, once removed, who's, you know, married to a Cancer, right? And their wedding was very a very private affair. It's honestly weird they invited me—" Mic's exuberance is cut off by a familiar ringtone coming over the speakers.

"I'm not late," Shouta answers, and he swears under his breath as he misses the green light, van jostling as he breaks. "Yet."

Fukukado's laugh crackles. *"I'm not calling to harass you for being late."*

"Why are you calling?"

"I want you to go straight to a client. We've got a real insectophobe on our hands—the poor guy's been calling for hours. He left three voicemails." She cackles. "I figure since you've got the van you could just scoot right on over to deal with the situation."

"I don't see how that's funny." But he sighs, "Just tell me what I need to know."

By the time she's done rambling—Shouta doesn't know why he willingly surrounds himself with chatterboxes, honestly—he's already pulled in front of what he hopes is the right place.

Shouta raps his knuckles on the PVC panel door. "Eraserhead Pest Control."

"Come in!" someone screeches from inside.

Wow. A real insectophobe, indeed. Or maybe just a real loudmouth.

When Shouta enters, he's struck by the condition of the place. The front door opens to a kitchen covered in flour, bowls and utensils caked in it and the smell of baked goods lingering.

A bit further down, he can see the screeching culprit—sorry, *client* whimpering and clutching at his chest like a damsel in distress, silky blond hair and pencil mustache the only things that look remotely put together about the man. Shouta doesn't think he's ever seen someone look so . . . *frazzled*. Except maybe himself.

Shouta likes his job. He's good at it. He knows about bugs and how to get rid of them, but in that moment, the roach on the floor between him and the terrified client seems less important than ever. Because in that moment, the client, Yamada Hizashi, opens his mouth to speak again.

"Please, help me."

He'd know that voice anywhere.

Shouta's staring, jaw unbolted, at a blond idiot in red slippers and a leather jacket, wondering where he went wrong; of all the thoughts racing through his mind, he is most loath to concede to the one that tells him not only is this *fool* Present Mic in the flesh but Shouta actually, somehow, finds him beautiful amidst the absurdity.



Pest control comes knocking at 7:27 with no nametag and a lackluster announcement.

The man is a knight in rumpled jumpsuit, face pulled into a grimace, eyes shadow-rimmed by exhaustion—he looks like he hasn't slept in about three days, hasn't shaved in maybe four. He's the kind of guy who'd clean up nice, who looks stupidly good with the scruff, a frog prince who'd transform with a little tender loving, or maybe Hizashi's just a grateful romantic who likes 'em disheveled. More than anything else, though, Hizashi can't help but think he looks cute with that little pout on his lips and those angry-looking eyebags.

"Please, help me," he begs. He does not temper the desperation in his voice.

The pest control man is his knight and Mr. Roach is the dragon, rearing its ugly head, two antennae raised in greeting to the knight, unafraid of its death staring it down.

In Mr. Roach's defense, the pest control guy *isn't* very deadly looking. In fact, he looks a little bit . . . like . . . Grumpy Cat. And if the current situation weren't so dire, Hizashi would probably let a little giggle slip at the comparison.

As it stands, the pest control guy draws his metaphorical sword, an aerosol foam can, and sprays Mr. Roach.

Mr. Roach twitches under the poison, Hizashi gasps, and then it's dead.

"Seems like the infestation isn't too severe. It'll take a few days."

"Thank you so much." No, he did not just sob from relief. That was not a sob. He just sounds like that, okay?

"I'm just doing my job." It looks like he wants to say more. Or he's just constipated. Emotionally.

Ugh. Dark and brooding. That's totally Hizashi's type. Shit.

"If you'll excuse me," Hizashi finally allows himself to put down the flamingo leg, "*I really need to use the bathroom. I'll be right back, I was just petrified of Mr. Roach, so I—*"

The man coughs, single eyebrows raised in incredulity. “Mr. Roach?”

Hizashi flushes. “Oh, that’s just a silly name I gave it to feel less scared. Like how you’re supposed to imagine people in their underwear when you’re public speaking.” Oh, God, that’s a thing, right?

Pest control nods minutely. “I’ll be here.”

“Sorry?” Hizashi tucks his hair behind his ear. (That’s right; he knows how to put the moves on.)

“When you’re done relieving yourself.”

Hizashi laughs loudly, and he can feel the way his cheeks turn tomato red. “Oh! Right! Be right back!”

He turns and scoots to the bathroom before he can embarrass himself further. He can redeem himself once his bladder *isn’t* about to burst.



“Roaches are a highly problematic insect to have in your home, as I’m sure you’re aware.”

“Right, right.” Yamada (Present Mic) nods along sagely.

“You’re going to want to focus on preventing them from coming back. It’s a total waste of my time and your money if you have to keep calling me back. That’s not to say it’s your fault that . . . *Mr. Roach* paid you a visit. But it’s in your best interest not to leave any snacks out for pests.”

“Of course! I’ll do whatever it takes.”

Shouta has every faith that’s true. “I’m going to investigate for roaches—unfortunately, that means moving furniture and appliances—and then I’m going to set out poison for the roaches. It is highly potent, but it’s irresistible to them.”

“Is it poisonous to humans, too?”

“I mean, don’t eat it.” Shouta grins. “But, no, you shouldn’t experience any ill-effects from having this stuff in your home. I’ll re-lay the poison as many times as necessary to get rid of them.”

“Great!”

“Great. Do you want to take me through the rooms now, so I can look for roaches?”

Yamada freezes, hesitates, a line forming in the centre of his forehead. “Actually . . . Is it okay if I just leave you to it?”

Shouta considers that; considers the fretful expression on Yamada’s face. He tells himself he’d much rather do his work *without* his client screaming in his ear, he’s not sympathetic. “Of course,” he says. “Whatever makes you comfortable.”



As Hizashi nears the end of two hours, his voice becomes slower and softer. Most of his listeners don’t tune in live during late nights, but he doesn’t want a rambunctious ending to disturb those that do. And, yeah, maybe his voice was already hoarse from his conversation with Mr. Roach this morning.

Hizashi talked about the pest control guy, who he dubbed Mr. Grumpy Cat, for the majority of the episode—he couldn't help himself.

He almost can't believe how openly he's gushing about the pest control man—except that he can totally believe it, because this is what he does. He bears his thoughts to the world; every fear, every hope, every strange encounter.

He wonders what the man is doing right now. Sleeping, probably, hopefully—he sure looked like he could use it.

Mr. Grumpy Cat is mysterious—and handsome if you look beyond the scruff and bloodshot eyes. He might be a little bit in love.

“Well, that's it for tonight, listeners! I hope you enjoyed. This has been Present Zenith: Live, with your host, Present Mic.”

Hizashi spins in his spinny chair—his bed for the night. He left his pillow at home, which is a real shame considering he's relegating himself to this space until Mr. Roach's colleagues are all taken care of, and he doesn't dare brave his home alone in the dark of night. Hizashi doesn't fuck around with bugs. Obviously.

In the morning, when Mr. Grumpy Cat can protect him, Hizashi will go pick up his pillow and a few other things he forgot when he was too busy high-tailing it out of there.

It will *not* in any part be an attempt to chat up Mr. Grumpy Cat and get his name. Nope. Definitely not.



On recommendation from his therapist, Shouta has a running list of things he likes about his job. It goes like this:

- Killing pests is satisfying.
- It forces him out of bed in the morning.
- Having a purpose is nice.
- He can listen to music or podcasts while he works.

Obviously, *Present Zenith* is what filters through his earbuds today, like most days. He's not obsessed or anything, and he knows it's probably weird to listen to it *inside Mic's house*, it's just what he's used to.

He's hunkered under the bathroom sink, flashlight in one hand and tube of gluey cockroach poison in the other.

“So I showed her how to read her natal chart. And you'll never guess what? Scorpio in sun, moon, and rising! What is it about Scorpios, listeners? No wonder I liked her so much!”

Shouta wipes his brow. It's not strenuous work—and, like he thought, the infestation is small—but suddenly he's sweating.

Something pokes his shoulder. He jumps, narrowly avoiding a head collision with the ceramic sink basin and ripping out his earbuds in the process.

“I'm so sorry!” Yamada jumps back too. “I'm just here to get . . .”

His pillow, he doesn't say and never gets to, but Shouta knows from last night's unexpected live episode. Instead of finishing his sentence, he pauses, head cocked like a colourful bird. Yamada laughs nervously, pierced ears turning pink.

It's then that Shouta realizes his earbuds have disconnected and *Present Zenith* is playing out loud, amplified by bathroom acoustics. Shouta hurries to pause the episode, fumbling with his phone and the flashlight and the tube of toxic paste.

They stare at each other, and Shouta feels his cheeks flaming.

He coughs awkwardly. "Can I . . . help you?" he finally offers.

"You like astrology?" Yamada asks eagerly, the corners of his moustache lifting with his hopeful smile.

Shouta's heart hammers. That's not where he expected this interaction to go. "Yeah." He sniffs.

"Me too!" Yamada points to his chest excitedly.

"I know." It's true, but he shouldn't have said it. He tries to backpedal, but something about Yamada's expression stops him. Instead, he says, "I'm a fan of the show."

Understatement of the century, but whatever, Yamada doesn't need to know that.

"I—" Yamada's grin turns cherry, and his hands come up to hide his blush. *Cute*. "Ah! That's the nicest thing anyone's ever said to me!"

Shouta didn't think it was possible to flush even brighter than either of them currently are, but he catches Yamada's eye and somehow they're managing just fine.

"The name's Aizawa, by the way," Shouta offers. "Though, 'Mr. Grumpy Cat' is a very . . . thoughtful nickname."

"I'm good at those." Yamada laughs sheepishly. "Sorry for, y'know, making a whole episode about you."

"It's alright. You painted me in a very favourable light."

"How could I not?" Yamada blurts. "You're my saviour!"

Shouta ducks his head. "I'm just doing my job."

Yamada protests, and somehow steers the conversation back to astrology until he's managed to suss out most of Shouta's chart—he's *elated* at the Scoprio status—and practically forces him to try his mother's pie crust recipe.

It turns out Shouta likes Yamada in person just as much as he likes Mic through the filter of a microphone. It's almost dreamlike how well they get along.

Weeks later, when all the roaches are long gone, Shouta finds himself showing up for date nights more often than not. He never *quite* sheds his title of "Mr. Grumpy Cat", but that's okay.

Fic written by Lilleeboi ♦





SAGITTARIUS

NOVEMBER 22 – DECEMBER 21



HALFWAY

As the kiddos file out to the train station with the teacher next door, Fuyumi slumps in her chair and pulls up the calendar on her laptop for the twelfth time.

It's still only Wednesday.

It's the Wednesdays that get to her, the routine. She's trapped here in the middle of the week.

She rolls her chair closer to the window. It's gray, even the brown of the tree trunks muted with the cold and clouds smothering the sky.

Hopefully it snows.

She sets her palm against the glass, enjoying the cold and the way her body heat creates a dewy fog around her handprint. She's tempted to lay her cheek against it too; the cold has always soothed her. She wonders if, across the city, Mom is doing the same thing from her room on the third floor.

She lets her hands go cold and watches as frost crawls from her fingers then melts back slowly to drip in teardrops down the glass.

Before leaving, she looks at the calendar one last time.

It's still Wednesday.

Her horoscope announces itself on the calendar: *With Mercury in retrograde, there are bound to be misunderstandings, gaps in communication, and frustrations, but you're a Sagittarius; you've got it handled! Just remember to be open about your feelings!*

She huffs a tired laugh.

The streetlights blur by her on the train home, and when she arrives, they're too bright and too glaringly still.

It's only 5:00, and Fuyumi likes the cold, but not the dark.

"Shouto!" she calls out as she enters the house and slips off her shoes, hoping he's come home for dinner. It's more common these days.

It's not Shouto that answers, but Natsu.

"Fuyumi? Thank God, I was starting to think it was just me and Dad."

He flicks on the lights when he crosses into the living room and Fuyumi steps forward to give him a hug. The hug he gives back is wholehearted and warm, like everything Natsu does. She feels a little limp in comparison, wrung out from the dreariness of the day.

That won't stop her from being a sister, though.

“Natsu!” She grins. “What’re you doing here?”

He rubs at his eye. “There was like this student conference thing. Dad offered me money to stay at a hotel, but I’m *not* taking his pity. I can’t just let him think he can *fix* things like that, I’m—”

He cuts himself off, rubbing the back of his head with a grimace. “You know how it is, Fuyumi. But I was also hoping to catch you and Shouto.”

With a smile and a little flourish of her hand, she replies, “Today’s your lucky day! Here I am, in the flesh! Have you eaten? We have leftovers.”

“Nah, that’s okay, I stopped on my way here.”

Fuyumi leaves him in the living room to heat herself up some leftovers, opting for the microwave instead of the stove. There’s something so much more exhausting about getting out a pan and waiting for it to heat up. The lights in the kitchen take a while to get bright, and they finally start to feel warm right as the microwave dings. She grabs her food, switches off the light, and joins Natsu in the living room.

“Shouto’s coming,” he tells her, not looking up from his phone.

“Oh! Ask him if he’s eaten.”

After some tapping, Natsu tells her, “Yeah. He says it’ll just be a short visit since we’re all here for once.”

Fuyumi wonders how long it took for them to start excluding Mom from “all here.” With Touya, it had been pretty quick. He wasn’t coming back. Then, “all” had been awkward and stilted, Father and Shouto passing by Fuyumi and Natsu in the living room while Mom looked in from the hallway.

Maybe, since Mom left, there hasn’t even *been* an “all.” Maybe Fuyumi’s ungrateful, wishing that it extended beyond the three of them and to their parents.

“That’s great!” she says. “Maybe we could have some ice cream? Or play some Mario Kart?”

Natsu groans.

“Hey,” Fuyumi teases. “Don’t be that way! I’m sure with some practice you could tie me someday.”

While she’s washing her plastic food container, Shouto comes in. He’s quiet about it, but Natsu isn’t, and neither is their father when he follows a couple of steps behind.

“Natsuo!” he bellows. “Good to see you!” Fuyumi cringes. He’s trying a little too hard; Natsu needs more time.

“Why are you with Shouto,” he accuses, and Fuyumi abandons the dishwasher to rush out, stopping only to dry her hands.

She puts on a bright smile. "Hey, Shouto! Welcome home, Dad! It's so good to see you! It's rare that we're all here together!" And still, it's not *all* of them.

She dries her still-damp hands on her skirt; she hasn't changed out of her school clothes yet. "Have you eaten? There's leftover chicken from yesterday!"

Dad is the only one to take her up on her offer, and this time, she rushes back out to the living room while the microwave runs. This family falls apart without her there; she can't trust them even for one and a half microwave minutes.

"He's my intern," Dad explains to Natsu, and before he can answer, Fuyumi placates.

"Oh, that's really nice! I didn't realize you were interning with Dad again, Shouto."

Shouto's cheeks and nose are red from the cold outside. His hair's messed up, from a hat, maybe.

"He's the Number One," Shouto says as an explanation. "Hi, Fuyumi."

Natsu snorts. "Not really. It should be Hawks. Just wait until the next billboards."

Fuyumi smiles at Shouto.

"You're right," Dad agrees with a bowed head, his earlier enthusiasm gone. "I know."

"No, no, Dad, don't say that, come on."

Natsu scoffs.

"He's right," Dad continues. "I've been a—"

Fuyumi zones him out, frustrated. She knows already what he's about to say: I've been a bad hero and a worse father, I wasn't there for you, I hurt Shouto, I don't deserve what I have, I don't deserve forgiveness. She wants to shout. Nothing makes her angrier than the defeatist attitude. Dad, the students—I *can't do it*, they whine.

So, what? What about all the work I've put in, don't you see it? Don't you see how hard I'm trying?

"You're right," Natsu snaps. "And it pisses me off to have you come in here and tell us *now*, after everything, that you're going to change."

To have him 'come in here'? He *lives* here. Natsu's more of an intruder than their father is, to come home and immediately trample everything Fuyumi's been coaxing to grow.

She blinks, and smiles. "I appreciate that he's trying to change," she tells Natsu, but it's not really directed at him.

Shouto's so quiet, but anything he says, people listen. "I don't like him. But he *is* doing better."

The microwave beeps, and she ignores it. No one else moves to get the food either, too busy moping and being angry and everything else, probably. She makes eye contact with Shouto, who is not angry or moping that she can tell, but then, she can never tell what Shouto's thinking; she barely knows him. Sometimes, she gets so caught up in making sure she doesn't resent Father for that, that she forgets to actually think about Shouto.

Natsu sighs and looks down at his phone, bringing his legs up under him and leaning into the arm of the chair away from everyone.

"Natsu..." she says. "Could you try... halfway?"

There's a flare of warmth to her right, telling her that Dad's activated his flames, but they die out immediately. "Fuyumi. No one has to meet me halfway."

Right. It just falls to her to meet everyone all the way there.

She smiles. "I will, Dad! I just really want things to work out."

There's silence from her brothers, and a drooping half-smile from her dad.

The microwave beeps again, whiny and needy.

Fuyumi pipes up. "I'll just... I'll check the microwave."

"Good work today, Shouto," she hears as she leaves the living room.

The microwave light is on, the kitchen lights warming up once again, but she stares out instead at the dark street.

It's too hot in here, constricting, so she touches the glass and opens the window. She knows that Father doesn't like the cold. Natsu doesn't mind it. She's not sure about Shouto. Growing up, it was always Fuyumi and Mom wanting to cool things off.

She remembers from earlier, *be open about your feelings*, but that's okay. She doesn't need to.

She would say, *look at me! Do none of you care?*

Or, *think about someone other than yourself, I love you, but look around, this does no one any good, why am I the only one who's trying?* She can't say that. It would only make things worse.

She clenches her hands together, then pulls the chicken and rice out of the microwave. The glass of the plate is too hot, so she slides her sleeves down over her hands to carry it out.

She gives it to Dad, then realizes she didn't get him a fork.

But she's tired.

She sits down and turns to Shouto. School's going well, he says, and he's learning a lot.

"It's chilly," he observes.

"Oh! I'm sorry, I forgot that I opened a window! Here, let me..."

Natsu pretends to tap at his phone, Dad is eating his rice with the nice chopsticks they keep in the coffee table drawer, and Shouto is rolling a flame over his fingertips.

Fuyumi trails off and does not get up to shut the window, even when, five minutes later, it starts to snow.

Fic written by pbjamas ◇





CAPRICORN

DECEMBER 21 – JANUARY 20



ARCAÑA

"Tarot?" Keigo parroted back cluelessly. He cocked his head to the side, watching Kaina shuffle the cards with rapt attention. "What's that?"

Kaina smiled mysteriously and held out the cards in his direction. "Want me to tell you your fortune?"

Keigo blinked. "Fortune? Like reading the future?"

"Mmhmm!" She nodded her head fervently, her choppy blue and pink hair bouncing with the motion. Then she paused and grinned sheepishly, rubbing the back of her head awkwardly. "Well, not really. The way I understand it, it's more of a guidance thing? Like, you ask it a question and then it'll provide advice."

"Like a magic-8 ball?" he asked, trying to liken it to something for which he had reference.

Kaina shook her head. Paused. A look of uncertainty crossed her face. "I guess?" She shrugged. "Here, it'll be easier for me to show you." She set the deck on the floor between them. "Okay, the first step is to—"

"Hawks, Nagant!"

Kaina's mouth snapped shut and their spines both went ramrod straight at the sound of their hero names. They glanced at their handler, who was standing in the doorway of the room with an unimpressed look on his face.

"Break's over, report to training room five."

Hawks tried to keep his disappointment from showing on his face as Kaina hid the tarot cards away in her school bag, both of them scurrying off to get to the training room on time.



"A lot of the girls in my year have started doing tarot," Kaina said. It was an off-handed remark, but Keigo absorbed every word she said like a sponge. He wanted to be a hero he desperately, *desperately* wanted to be a hero—but he drank up every detail the older girl offered about her normal day-to-day life at school like he was parched.

Which, he supposed, he was.

"Not really sure who started the trend, though. It was probably Yua, her mom watches a lot of American talk shows." Kaina's brow furrowed in thought for a moment before she shrugged her shoulders and continued flipping cards over. "It doesn't really matter. It's just the western version of omikuji."

It took Keigo longer than he'd like to admit to pin down the word she used. His family hadn't been one for visiting shrines.

"What's this one mean?"

"Hmm?" Kaina looked at the card he was pointing at—the one with the chained up man and woman. "Oh, uh, let me check." She started flipping through the little guidebook. "Can you read what it's called?"

Keigo wouldn't call his English particularly great, but it was good enough for him to sound it out. "The Devil."

"Devil, devil, devil... Got it!" She laid the guidebook on the floor, pointing at the small text. Keigo was glad the older girl was more fluent in English, because it definitely would have taken him a *while* to sound that out. "Uh, it says 'The Devil, upright, represents the dark forces that prevent you from being the best version of yourself, whether these dark forces are negative habits or dependencies. You have tricked yourself into thinking you have no control over these forces, and can never break free from their hold. Deep down, you know it's to your detriment."

"When the Devil shows up in a reading, it can bring these dark forces into your conscious awareness, and provides a chance to break free from dark forces. As the Devil is a major arcana, it is unlikely these forces will disappear overnight. It might take a great amount of willpower and strength to free yourself from their influences, but know it is possible to break free, and it is up to you to overcome these forces."

"Dark forces? Are they talking about... villains?"

"Tarot predates quirks, so I don't think so?" Kaina shrugged. "But I could be wrong."

Keigo hummed his ascent before another thing on the page caught his eye. It definitely wasn't kanji or English lettering. He pointed at it. "What's this?"

"Oh!" Kaina grinned. "That's a zodiac sign."

"Like the animals people are if they're born in a certain year?"

"That's the Chinese zodiac, this is the Western zodiac. They don't use animals. I think." Kaina gave him a silly smile. "They're not called animals in English, but they definitely use animal imagery!" She pointed at the squiggle on the page that Keigo had been asking about. "This is the one for Capricorn, I think. December twenty-second to January nineteenth."

"Oh!" Keigo felt his face light up as he picked up the little guidebook, looking at the funny little characters his brain was sluggishly translating. "That's me!"

"Mmhmm."

"What's yours? October tenth, what's the western zodiac for that?"

Kaina made a considering noise, tilting her head back and forth with a concentrated expression for a few seconds before she answered. "Libra? Yeah. September twenty-third to October twenty-second."

"Does that one have a tarot card for it as well?"

Kaina's back straightened and she puffed out her chest, a smug look on her face. "Justice! That's my arcana."

Keigo clicked his tongue in vague annoyance, though he couldn't quite keep the fondness out of his voice when he said, "Lucky."

"I know, right? Poor Keigo, stuck with the Devil. I suppose it's my job to defeat you, what a shame."

"Hey!"

"*Aish*, be quiet," Kaina said, waving him off as she glanced away with a nonchalant look. "I'm kidding, I'm not gonna hurt you. You're enough of a danger to yourself and your fragile chicken bones on your own, you don't need me to help out with that."

"Wow," Keigo responded flatly. "You're so nice."

"I know. I'm too good for you, you should be treating me better, honestly. Kids these days."

"I didn't realize you were so old, Oneesan."

"You *brat*—"



Kaina had never considered herself a particularly superstitious woman.

She'd followed schoolyard trends, she made origami fortune tellers with her friends, she'd poke fun at friends who broke their combs about their upcoming misfortune, but she'd never really truly believed in any of it. She'd believed in them in the same fashion that one believed in a movie—it could get her heart racing, but it was more suspension of disbelief than a genuine feeling.

She'd enjoyed tarot well enough, however. She would fiddle and shuffle the cards when she was stressed or nervous, thankful for the distraction of something to do with her hands, and it was something to laugh about in the school cafeteria. There was a technique and thought process to it, which Kaina found more interesting than looking up horoscopes or slapping her hand over the mouth of someone who whistled after the sun went down. It was like making up small little stories each time.

Keigo had always been fascinated by the practice, although Kaina was fairly sure half of it had been appreciation for the artwork on the cards. Maybe. Or the Commission's curriculum for him didn't educate him on things like superstitions and astrology, since they probably hadn't expected him to be exposed to things like that.

It didn't really matter. He turned out well enough, it seemed.

Not *well*, per se, more *useful*.

That was a more accurate way to describe someone who put themselves in the sort of situation where two of their limbs are burned off, all to follow orders.

She didn't have that old deck of tarot cards anymore, it had disappeared along with the rest of her previous belongings when she went to tartarus. The cards were still stiff and new, but the motions of shuffling and sifting through them were a familiar lull.

Kaina remembered Keigo's disappointment each time he convinced her to do a reading and the Devil arcana didn't show up. She'd expected him to be put off by the negative connotations of the title, but the small pre-teen boy had taken it in stride, always insisting that since it was the representation of Capricorns, it meant good luck.

She hadn't corrected him on the fact that that wasn't exactly how tarot worked. She admonished him for relying on luck instead of skill, however. That was usually enough to get him to stop bothering her about tarot readings and into a competition of accuracy, his feathers literally ruffled from his high-pitched indignation.

She'd given him the Devil arcana card from that deck when she debuted. She wondered if he still had it.

Keigo was foolishly sentimental, but he was foolishly obedient. She could see it going either way.

She shuffled the cards in her hands again, keeping a careful watch out over the skyline of Tokyo, ignoring the mutterings of Chisaki behind her. Her target would appear soon enough. Clouds were gathering overhead, and it would start to rain soon enough.

She idly flipped over the top card and pinched her lips to bite back her amusement.

A drop of rain hit the center of the card, and she tucked the deck into her pocket in anticipation of the storm.

It was well into spring, far past the time of Capricorns, but Keigo had always been a stubborn brat. He'd probably insist that it was lucky.

Fic written by crimsonseekers ◇





AQUARIUS

JANUARY 21 – FEBRUARY 18



FLOATING

Contrary to popular belief, Tsu can't breathe underwater. She's not a fish. Her quirk, "Frog," means that she, like a frog, must come up for air eventually. She can hold her breath for much longer than her peers, but her lungs burn for oxygen and her head screams for her to get to the surface just like anyone else who stays underwater too long.

Sometimes she fights that feeling.

Tsu pushes her body to stay under the water, well past her limits—Plus Ultra!—until she can't take a second longer. Especially in the bath.

The water chilled by time almost makes Tsu go into hibernation. She's the last of the family to soak in the tub meaning the stagnant water has had to cool since her younger sister's bath. The Asui family normally shares the same bath water, both environmentally conscious but Tsu also knows for money reasons, but she also knows her younger siblings sometimes empty out cold water by the buckets full to replace the water with fresh hot water if they're not the first to bathe.

Not Tsu. She's fine with the cold water.

She's not comfortable with the chill that seeps through her skin. She's not eased by the ache in her chest when she finally does come up for air after staying underwater too long. But then again, she's not at ease most of the time.

It's the last night of break, and she feels restless. Tsu is excited to start classes again, to see all her friends, but whether she stays at the dorms or here at home, it doesn't really matter. Anywhere she goes, Tsu carves out a place for herself. She finds a routine, draws a map and schedule in her head, lets her feet remember where to take her so she doesn't have to think too hard about it. Much like she does as she steps out of the bath, lets the water drain, and dries her hair.

Dressed in a nightgown, her feet take her to the bedroom she shares with her siblings. They snore. But so does Tsu.

Her siblings were so happy to see her when Tsu came home for winter break, even if her younger brother, now ten, was too cool to show it. She was--is--happy to see them too. Too quickly though, everything fell into the same pattern.

Every morning she wakes up, prepares food for her siblings, wakes them, makes food for them to take to playdates or to pull from the fridge for lunch. Then chores: dishes, clothes, cleaning. Training. Dinner. Baths. Repeat.

Tsu loves her family, and they love her. But even on break, Tsu has seen her parents twice and never at the same time. The family doesn't sit together for meals or for discussions. Her parents each work two jobs and her siblings now busy themselves with swimming

practices and friends that Tsu never had the free time to enjoy when she was their age.

Not that she can picture herself in a sports club. Plus, she had plenty of friends to hang around during classes. Besides, Tsu can't imagine a place she'd rather be than listening to her sister talk excitedly about returning to school while she prepares breakfast. She sets the last of the fried fish in front of her sister before she grabs her backpack to go back to UA. It's a little heavier than normal with her bringing her clothes back to the dorm, and she has to adjust her white blouse when the backpack tugs it askew.

"Nee-chan? Are you leaving, -ro?"

Tsu blinks. She turns to her sister, her eyes wide. It takes her a second to realize why she's surprised.

"Not without saying goodbye." Tsu walks over and gives a quick peck on the top of her sister's head, right between the pigtails. Her sister beams and Tsu smiles back.

Insides, she feels unsettled.

She thinks about it as she walks to the train station. She thinks about it when she squeezes herself into a corner seat and stares out the window. She thinks about it almost the entire ride back to UA.

Tsu hadn't thought about saying goodbye earlier. Did that make her a bad sister? The thought keeps bouncing around her head, and she keeps trying to catch it so she could come to a decision, yes or no.

"What do you mean you haven't bought the supplies yet?"

A bristle travels through the train like a wave, but Tsu only turns to look at the man with his cellphone between clawed fingers and a sharp tooth sticking out from his top lip.

"No," he half yells, "I said I needed it by *last* Friday! Last! Look, fix it and call me or don't bother calling me at all."

The man presses his claw to the smartphone's screen then stuffs the phone in his pocket, and good. Tsu was about to stand up if he didn't.

She doesn't understand people like him. She doesn't understand how anyone could be so ignorant to the trouble they cause those around them. He is making the train car uncomfortable. While no one else might confront him, she would have--was about to, even.

No matter where she is or who she is with, Tsu shares her thoughts.

...Though that isn't quite true. She often doesn't say much in the dorms.

When she finally arrives at the 1A dorms, she's almost knocked off her feet by her best friend's hug.

"Tsu! How are you?" Ochako smiles and it's contagious. Tsu smiles too.

"Good, kero. How was your break?"

Just like that the flood gates open. First Ochako goes over every detail of her break, her joy from seeing her parents for the first time in so long almost overwhelming. Then Tenya joins the group and shares his brother's improved health. Then Izuku walks down the stairs, apparently having arrived much earlier but having been up in his room the whole time.

Tsu is comfortable in water; even when she's too tired to swim, she floats so naturally. But with the conversations flowing around her, nearly non-stop, Tsu has no idea what to do. She hangs at the edge of her friend group, floats off to another to see if she feels more comfortable there. Not that it helps. It doesn't matter where she goes, she never knows what to say. When or how does she jump in? Where is there space for her?

When she can't figure out the ebb to the flow in her friends' words, Tsu finds herself drifting further and further away. Her mind leaves the conversations entirely as she drifts off. She feels like she's flying. Floating. If she looks down, she worries she'll be staring at herself.

She doesn't look down.

Instead, she forces her physical body to leave her friends and takes a seat on an empty couch next to an also quiet Kouda. He smiles at her, and she smiles back as she turns on the television. Only then does she breathe again. She hadn't realized she was drowning.

The door opening brings another overwhelming wave of energy.

"Eri!" Midoriya's voice is the first of a chorus of the tiny girl's name.

The force of nature that is 1A surrounds their guest, visibly taking the breath from the girl. She clings to their sensei's pants leg, angling her body inward and behind the leg like it's a shield. If anyone other than Tsu notices, they don't adjust. Their questions and compliments overlap into discord. The small glance of Eri's face that Tsu can catch from her spot on the couch is that of utter fluster. Tsu feels her heart ache in empathy.

"Hey everyone," Tsu finally speaks up. For reasons she'll never quite understand, her words always command her classmates attention, as they do now. "Is anyone else hungry, kero? I can start making dinner."

"Me!" "I am!" "We should—"

The wave of attention that had hit Eri straight on disperses into a manageable tide as most students pull away from the little girl to prepare for dinner in their own ways. Tsu stands to go to the kitchen but sees the look of relief on Eri's face before she's out of the room.

That makes Tsu smile.

She's still smiling half-way through dinner prep when she hears a small voice by her waist. "Can I help?"

"Of course, kero."

Tsu doesn't make direct eye contact as she pulls up a chair for Eri to stand on. She pulls over a bowl of green beans and demonstrates how to break off each end with practiced ease. It takes Eri more effort to snap her first green bean, but as soon as she does, Tsu turns back to the fish she's frying.

The kitchen is quiet. Warm from the stove and the crackle of hot oil, the atmosphere is comfortable. Cozy. It's just Tsu and Eri, and they're both silent for a long time.

"I help Sho cook," Eri whispers eventually.

"That's good, kero."

Tsu can feel Eri's eyes shift to her but pretends she doesn't.

"He doesn't let me cut the vegetables," Eri says a little louder this time, but slowly, as if feeling out each word. "But that's okay, because he let me stir the soup or sauce. That's important! Otherwise it'll burn."

"Oh yeah?"

The change in Eri is immediate. She's radiant when she lifts her head up and begins speaking in earnest. She explains all the things she can and can't do in the kitchen; spends a lot of time discussing how fun it is to bake. Her enthusiasm purifies, and Tsu has never breathed so easily as she does when Eri speaks.

Tsu still feels like she's floating a bit, but Eri never seems to expect Tsu to contribute to the conversation. That means Tsu can relax. She can enjoy the warmth that propels her up, up, up. This moment feels familiar, like she's talking to her own sister. It's a safe feeling. As if Tsu knows, should she stop floating she'll still be okay. She won't fall because she can fly.

"Eri."

Tsu pulls the last piece of fish from the flyer and turns in tandem with Eri to see her homeroom teacher at the door.

"It's time to go home for dinner."

Eri's pout makes Aizawa smile, such a rare sight indeed. Then Eri turns to her as if asking if she's excused. Tsu nods, and the little girl jumps from the chair to her father for all intents and purposes.

They leave the kitchen, hand in hand, and Tsu can hear the chorus of good nights and good byes from her classmates.

Right! Good bye.

This time Tsu doesn't forget; it just takes her a second to put the finishing touches to the bento box she'd been preparing on the side. Still, she has to run to catch the pair on the front steps of the door.

"Eri?"

The little girl turns, eyes wide and bright as they immediately fall onto the bento box.

"For lunch, kero," Tsu says easily.

Eri looks from Tsu up to Aizawa who nods as Tsu had done earlier. Then Eri runs at her, practically knocking her off her feet with the way she throws herself into hugging Tsu's thighs.

"Thanks big sis!"

Tsu flushes but focuses on handing her teacher Eri's bento so she can hug back.

Fic written by Scientifically Sinful ◇





PISCES

FEBRUARY 19 – MARCH 20



THE SUN AND THE GALAXY

The picture he receives from Mirio is a clear shot of the night sky, stars shining bright, with the caption ‘reminded me of you.’ Tamaki smiles slightly and aims his own phone at the sky, where the unforgiving sun is bearing down on him. He sends the picture to Mirio, copying his caption.

Within seconds, his phone vibrates with a FaceTime call.

“I thought you were on patro—oh,” Mirio starts excitedly and upon noticing Tamaki’s hero costume, he trails off.

“Lunch,” Tamaki tells him simply, aiming his phone so Mirio can clearly see Fat Gum and Red Riot in the background trying to choose where they want to eat. Tamaki had given up on the debate as soon as it had started.

“Oh,” Mirio says, smiling lightly now. “Make sure you eat properly,” he says, appearing to be firm though his tone remains tender.

Tamaki smiles back small, though the smile quickly fades when he notices that the light in Mirio’s eyes is duller than usual, the grin not as large as most days, his shoulders and jaw tense. “Mirio,” he starts, quietly, “are you okay?”

He can see the internal battle within Mirio as he tries to think of the correct answer. “I, um,” he starts, hesitantly, and Tamaki moves further away from the other heroes, a dull ache in his chest at the prospect of there being something wrong. “I just can’t sleep. It’s nothing,” he says. “So I saw the stars and they reminded me of you and well... maybe I just wanted to see you.”

Tamaki tries hard to not blush, ducking so that the civilians around them don’t see the crimson rising on his cheeks nonetheless. “You’re so cheesy,” Tamaki murmurs, scratching his cheek bashfully, still unable to fully look at Mirio.

On his phone, Mirio laughs, a laugh full of mirth and glee, loud and light and almost instantly Tamaki finds his eyes drawn to his boyfriend, so he can experience it all first-hand. “Well,” Mirio starts, “it helped. So thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Tamaki says, almost petulantly, though Mirio grins back when he notices the corners of his lips turning up slightly. “What was that about anyway?” he questions, genuinely curious.

Mirio shrugs. “Stars remind me of you,” he says, like it’s the most obvious statement in the world. “Impressive, beautiful and always leaving me in awe—that’s you.”



Mirio starts sending him pictures of stars daily after that. Sometimes it will be a stray star on a canvas of navy, drowned out by the bright city lights wherever the hero is. Other times it's a sky filled to the brim with constellations, with glimmering dots so close that they look like they're connecting, and then Mirio tells him about the constellations, and what they mean.

Even when they're busy—when the radio reports tell Tamaki that there was a mass villain attack, or an earthquake, or another naturally occurring disaster where Mirio is—they find the time to take a picture and send it. Tamaki takes pictures of the sun: at its highest in the noon, just peeking over the horizon as he goes on his morning run, or low in the sky drenched with shades of crimson, orange and pale pinks. They all remind him of Mirio, his sun, the star that his whole world orbits.

"How do you know this?" Tamaki asks him one day, when they're on the phone and Mirio is telling him about the latest constellation he's spotted.

"I read about it when I can't sleep," Mirio admits with a sigh. "The travel is just difficult. Of course, I want to save people, protect them and do what I can but..." he trails off sadly. *But it's difficult*, Tamaki finishes for him internally. It's difficult being away from your friends, your family, the place you grew up in... Tamaki clears his throat, instantly adamant to bring that happy lilt to Mirio's voice.

"Hey," he says, "tell me about the other one you sent me."

"It's called Coma Berenice," Mirio explains, voice clear and less hesitant, confident once more. "It's a fairly modern constellation! The story behind it is really good as well," he says, pausing, and Tamaki knows he's waiting for the cue to go ahead, seeing as it's getting late and Tamaki has an early start tomorrow.

"Go on," he says softly, smiling lightly, wishing Mirio could see him.

"So according to the story, Berenice's husband fought in a war and she was scared for him, unsure of whether he'd return. So she promised Aphrodite—goddess of love, remember?—that she would cut her hair as a sacrifice if her husband returned home safely. He came back and she made the sacrifice; it was accepted by Aphrodite and it is said that she placed the hair in the sky, therefore making the constellation. So it looks a bit like a lock of hair!"

Tamaki hums, resting his head on his pillow, eyes closing at the sound of Mirio's voice, shoulders instantly relaxing, all tension draining from his body.

"Cut my hair to ensure your safety?" he murmurs, voice drowsy with sleep. "That's a price far too steep."

On the other end, Mirio laughs, a sound that has Tamaki smiling wider. "Go to sleep, Tamaki," Mirio says, tone gentle. Tamaki agrees with another hum, but as they say their goodbyes and are due to hang up, he hears Mirio murmur "I'd sacrifice anything" and though his heart misses a beat, chest filling with warmth, he's too tired to react otherwise, sleep overtaking him.



It's three weeks until Tamaki's birthday. He wakes up that morning to his phone vibrating, buzzing silently by his head.

"Good morning!" Mirio's cheery voice greets him.

Tamaki opens one eye and looks at the bright screen, groaning slightly as a means of greeting. It's far brighter where Mirio is, and Tamaki tries to think of a list of countries that Mirio had mentioned the other day as he ran through his schedule, but the names escape him right now; maybe he'll remember after breakfast.

"It's almost your birthday," Mirio says and Tamaki huffs.

"I guess," he responds, not quite understanding the enthusiasm behind those words. "It's just another day. I have patrol, too."

"Nejire said she was taking you out for lunch?"

Tamaki huffs a short laugh. "She wouldn't let me get away with it," he says, stretching as he prepares to get out of bed. Mirio follows the movement, blue eyes focusing on the expanse of skin suddenly revealed by the bedsheets being pushed away.

He asks Mirio to stay on the phone as long as possible as Tamaki begins making his breakfast, slotting his phone against the wall on the counter and leaning an elbow on the surface.

Mirio tells him about what he learned about the Pisces constellation whilst on his lunch break. The Greek myth behind it is interesting, Mirio remarks, but it's the Roman origin that catches his attention: the story of Venus and Cupid, who tied themselves together with a cord and transformed into fish to escape a monster. Then he gets a bit distracted by the fact Tamaki is still shirtless, and whilst having Mirio's focus on him so fully still makes him bashful once in a while, he chuckles and prompts him on as Mirio tells him about the constellation he sent him last night: Pisces.

"If you look really closely," Mirio starts but pauses, chewing over his sandwich whilst his eyes flicker up and away from the phone, following someone walking past, "there are a lot of galaxies within the Pisces constellation! They're all quite far apart, but if you're looking at the constellation with a telescope, you can see them in the distance. Quite fitting, don't you think?"

Tamaki tilts his head. "How so?"

Mirio laughs, wholehearted and loud. "Well, it's *your* constellation," he says. "It couldn't *just* be a cluster of stars, it has to be more. It *is* more. It reminds me of the way you push yourself, always, to be better, to be even *more* of a hero than you already are."

Tamaki looks away, catching the blush rising high on his cheeks in his reflection. "Mirio," he murmurs, voice sheepish, "that's a pretty tenuous connection."

Mirio hums, thoughtful for a moment as he taps his chin. "I suppose," he agrees, "but you tell me I'm like the sun. That's a tenuous connection, too."

Tamaki wants to disagree immediately. The way Mirio pulls people in, the way he shines so brightly in a room full of people, all eyes drawn to him, it's far from tenuous—it's a clear connection.

"If I'm the sun," Mirio continues, "then you're just like that constellation of stars. Not one star, not two, but thousands, millions even, shining just as brightly, just as vast and impressive."

Tamaki doesn't really know what to say in response, mouth slightly agape. He clears his throat and Mirio laughs lightly.

"And there's a galaxy of things you're capable of doing!" he teases, and Tamaki threatens to hang up if Mirio continues to be this cheesy. He stops begrudgingly, and Tamaki is grateful to have the company as he continues with his morning routine.



He doesn't get to see Mirio until he finishes his patrol.

Tamaki closes the door behind him, leaning on it for a moment, each movement making his weary body groan, head spinning with nausea from the aftereffects of constantly using his quirk. It hasn't been the easiest day.

"Tamaki?"

He opens his eyes slowly, fighting against the natural instinct to close them when they immediately start burning with exertion, and it's so worth it when his eyes fall upon Mirio.

Mirio is already dressed down, just a plain shirt and a pair of dark sweatpants. There are bags under his eyes—a sight that Tamaki isn't used to—but the smile curling on his lips is soft and so tender that Tamaki feels his bottom lip wobble slightly. It's been weeks since he'd last seen his boyfriend.

Thankfully, Mirio reaches for him at the same time Tamaki moves to stumble into his arms. His fingers grip Mirio's shirt tightly, clutching onto the material desperately as he nuzzles his face into the taller hero's shoulder, closes his eyes and just breathes, so content to be wrapped in the warmth that is the embodiment of the sun standing before him.

"Happy birthday," Mirio whispers, and Tamaki feels like he might cry—the tears are already gathering in the corners of his eyes, even as Mirio pulls back slightly and cradles his face in his hands. "I love you," he whispers, and when Tamaki glances into those baby blue eyes focused solely on him, he can't help but smile, laughing softly even when his body aches with the movement.

He closes the distance between them quickly, pressing his lips to Mirio's, wrapping his arms around his neck. Kissing Mirio is like coming home—no, it's better than coming home. Even when he enters his apartment after a long day, he doesn't feel the warmth wrapping around his body, he doesn't feel the worries easing away and he definitely doesn't feel like he can't stop smiling; around Mirio however, all of those comes naturally, instantly, the moment Tamaki sees him, the moment their lips touch.

"I love you," he whispers, words in the silence of his apartment as soon as they pull away. He feels Mirio smile against his lips, the taller hero's arms wrapped tight around him. Tamaki takes a moment to just rest his forehead against Mirio's chest, listening to the quick heartbeat beneath his fingers, smiling slightly to himself.

The moment is disrupted by the grumbling of his stomach and Mirio laughs cheerfully as he pulls away. Tamaki squints up at him, grateful for the low lights in the apartment, though even now he wonders whether the apartment always just seems brighter because Mirio is in it.

"I got us food," he says and Tamaki smiles back because it clearly implies Mirio did not cook—a fact that's heavily supported by the lack of smoke in the apartment.

They don't eat in silence. Even when Tamaki yawns around the food Mirio had set out on the dining room table, he insists on staying up and listening to everything Mirio is willing to share with him from his missions in other counties. He mentions that Tamaki would be good at that, and tonight Tamaki doesn't have the strength to argue that strange people and unfamiliar situations would be his nightmare scenario, so he simply hums.

"Do you want your present?" Mirio asks as soon as they're finished eating, the excited look in his eyes just the same as Tamaki remembers it being when they were still children.

"I thought we agreed to no presents," he says, trying to keep his voice firm, lips turning down, but it's difficult to keep a straight expression when Mirio is smiling at him so widely.

"It's not a present," Mirio immediately argues back, even as he gets out of his seat to fetch something out of his travel bag. "It's more of a... keepsake."

Tamaki crosses his arms and leans back in his seat, raising an eyebrow at the choice of words. He watches Mirio pull out an envelope from his bag and sits forward slightly, suddenly curious at the contents.

When Mirio slides over the envelope for him to see, he looks bashful. Tamaki observes him for a moment, smiling small: it's an unusual sight to see Mirio shy, to see him unsure of something and whilst it's cute—rosy cheeks, small smiles, averting his gaze and a hand scratching at the back of his neck with uncertainty—it makes Tamaki even more curious about the envelope.

He clears his throat and opens the envelope, slowly pulling out the contents.

It seems to be a certificate of sorts, and Tamaki tilts his head as he reads over the writing quickly, taking in the information.

"You... named a star after me?"

His voice comes out breathless, the words stuck in his throat as the emotion suddenly wells up. He continues staring at the certificate, blinking, even as each time his eyes close, tears sting at the corners; he wills them away as hard as possible, unsure of what to say, how to thank Mirio for this present.

Mirio, as always, is far better at responding. He leans forward to grab Tamaki's hand and pulls him to his feet, all so he can rest a hand at his waist and smile at him, tilting his chin slightly so Tamaki is looking up into baby blue eyes.

"Of course," Mirio responds smoothly. "Now you can't argue with me when I say you shine so brightly."

How is Tamaki supposed to not cry at those words? Damn Mirio and the way he makes him feel, chest swelling with emotion, the butterflies in his stomach coming to life, skin tingling wherever Mirio touches, as he angles his head and kisses him, soft and slow.

Tamaki closes his eyes and surrenders to the sheer force that is Togata Mirio, accepting his fate. "Thank you," he whispers.

Mirio smiles softly, kissing him again, again and again, slower and slower still, until their foreheads are simply resting against each other, basking in the moment.

"It's also for a selfish reason," Mirio admits quietly, voice wavering with uncertainty again. "It's so that no matter where I am, I can look up at the night sky and think of you. It always makes me feel better."

Tamaki doesn't have the words to convey his love for Mirio. Instead, he wraps his arms around his boyfriend's neck, leans up, and kisses him again.

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